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Iraq urges action against firms building Turkey dams
DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Iraq and its Arab arch-rival, Syria, are considering taking action against European companies which are helping Turkey build dams on the Euphrates river, a senior Iraqi official disclosed Monday. "Among these measures is to deprive the French, British, Italian, Austrian, and Belgian companies which implement these dams of any projects that would become available in Syria or Iraq," Abdul Salim Salim told reporters after water crisis talks here. Syria and Iraq, ruled by rival wings of the Baath Party, have been leading for years. Syria was a key Arab component of the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq after it invaded Kuwait in 1990. But they have set aside their political differences because they fear Turkey plans to reduce the flows of the Euphrates and the Tigris river to divert their waters for massive hydroelectric and irrigation projects. Both rivers originate in Turkey, but are vital sources of water for Syria and Iraq. Their feud with Turkey has been building up for years, and tension heightened in 1989, when the Turks drastically reduced the Euphrates' flow for a month to fill the giant Ataturk dam.

Jordan Times

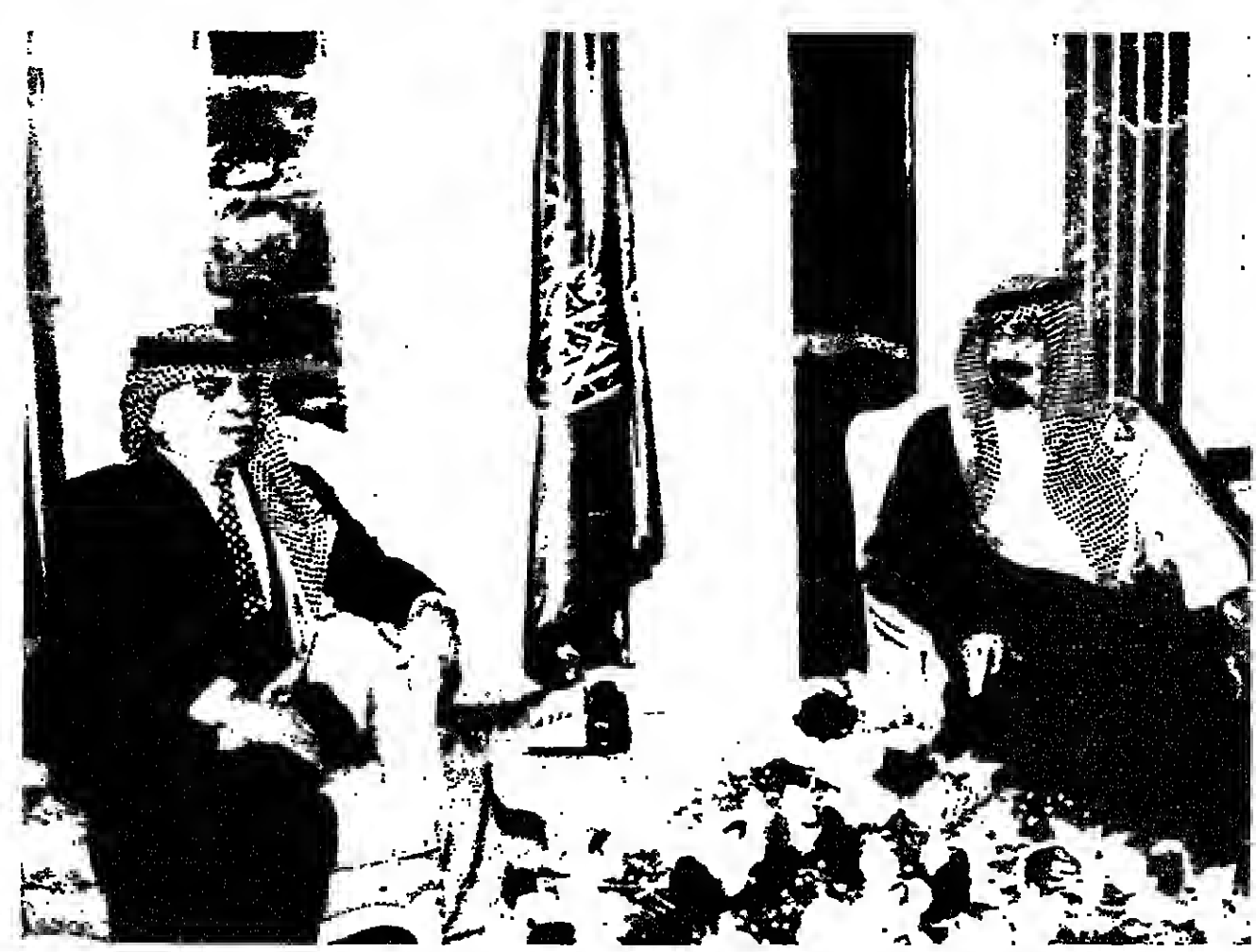
An independent Arab political daily published by the Jordan Press Foundation
جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية تصدر بالانجليزية عن المؤسسة الصحفية الاردنية الراي

Lebanon recognises Palestinian passport
BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon has agreed to recognise Palestinian passports under the same conditions as other countries' travel documents as long as they do not include stamps from Israel, the foreign ministry said Monday. Beirut has officially informed the Arab League of its recognition of the Palestinian passports under the laws covering all other travel documents, an authoritative source said. "For example, a Palestinian holding a document mentioning a trip to Israel on one of its pages would be banned from entering Lebanon," since December, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been able to use passports issued in April 1995 by the Palestinian National Authority, and recognised by 50 countries. Although they are checked by Israeli police at the Rafah border post between Gaza and Egypt and on the King Hussein Bridge between Israel and Jordan, the documents do not usually carry Israeli stamps. Lebanon, which suspended peace negotiations with Israel almost two years ago, has not yet officially recognised the Palestinian National Authority.

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King describes visit to Mecca, talks with Saudi leaders as very successful

By Sa'eda Kilani
Special to the Jordan Times
AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein described the one-day visit to Saudi Arabia and his talks with Saudi leaders as being very successful in eliminating past differences between the two countries and paving the way for normal and cordial ties. Upon his return home at dawn Monday, the King, who met with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz, expressed total satisfaction with the outcome of the visit and said that contacts between the two countries will be restored to their post-Gulf war era. "Spiritually, it was one of the most marvellous visits," the King said. "In addition, it gave us the chance to (hold) the meeting we had long been waiting for. I believe that everything that hampered the bilateral relations is forever gone." "Relations are stronger than before. They are based on our mutual keenness to maintain them at present and in the future," the King added. We will not allow any party to harm this relationship as happened in the past. The King, who travelled to Mecca to perform the Umra, a minor pilgrimage to the holy city, expressed confidence that this time relations between the two countries, strained by the Kingdom's stand during the 1990 Gulf crisis, have finally healed and said both sides agreed to maintain regular contacts. The King's visit was considered as the crowning of months of strenuous efforts to restore normal ties between the two countries.



His Majesty King Hussein Sunday confers with Saudi regent and crown prince, Abdullah Ben Abdul Aziz at the Prince's Court in Holy Mecca after the King and the accompanying delegation performed the Umra (Petra photo)

Princess Basma hosts iftar

AMMAN (Petra) — Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Monday hosted an iftar banquet at Al Hussein Youth City for members of the National Jordanian Women Committees and members of women unions. In a brief speech the Princess expressed pride in being affiliated to the Jordanian women movement which she said deserves all appreciation for its efforts to serve the nation. Present were wives of senior government officials including the wife of the prime minister, Fatin Kabariti, deputy Tugan Faisal along with 500 members of women unions.

Keep the noise down, minister tells mosques

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt's religious affairs minister ordered mosques to cut down on the use of loudspeakers to call the faithful to prayer, in a bid to curb noise pollution, the government daily Al Akhbar reported Monday. Hamdi Zaqqaz issued an order limiting mosques to using loudspeakers only for the five daily calls to Muslim prayer and for the noon sermon Fridays. Mosques are banned from broadcasting religious lessons, extra prayers or Koranic readings. "Use of loudspeakers in such cases must be limited to inside the mosque so as not to bother anyone," the minister said. Most of Egypt's thousands of mosques use outdoor loudspeakers during religious services.

Israeli arrested for drug trafficking

ACCRA (AFP) — The narcotics squad of the Ghana police service on Monday said an Israeli businessman had been arrested for possessing cocaine believed to have a street value of 500 million cedis (\$327,000). Avraham Alalu, 42, who normally resides in neighbouring Togo, appeared in court last week with his driver, Ibrahim Abubakar, a source in the narcotics squad said. Mr. Alalu is the managing director of Togo Ran 2001, a Togolese company. The hearing continues.

Egypt carries out first drugs execution

CAIRO (AFP) — A convicted heroin dealer was hung on Monday in the first drug-related execution in Egypt, the interior ministry said. Samir Sadiq Mohammad Sadiq, 52, was executed after being convicted in November 1993 for possessing 1.85 kilograms of heroin with intent to sell, the ministry said. Several Egyptians are on death row on drug charges but Sadiq was the first to be executed.

Opinion poll reveals: Kabariti government wins people's approval

AMMAN (J.T.) — Most Jordanians believe, to varying degrees, that Mr. Abdul Karim Kabariti will be a successful prime minister and that his government is able to "shoulder its responsibilities of the next stage" in Jordan's political life, according to an opinion poll whose initial findings were released today. According to the opinion poll, which was conducted by the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies over the past week, those Jordanians were divided in the extent to which the prime minister and his government were likely to be successful. While 51.7 per cent expected that the new prime minister will succeed in his job "to a large extent" only 32 per cent believed he will succeed to a certain (invariably called "medium") in the survey degree. A further 11.6 per cent said that they expected him to succeed to a minor degree, and only 4.6 per cent expected him "not to succeed." As far as "the degree" to which the government was believed able to shoulder responsibilities of the next stage, the results were as follows: To a large extent: 38 per cent; to a certain extent: 43.2 per cent; to a minor degree: 11.4 per cent; to not succeed 7.2 per cent. The same questions as above were asked to a separate, but smaller, group of citizens, which the poll identified as "opinion leaders," whose total in number was 501 (see accompanying story) on whether Mr. Kabariti, who became prime minister for the first time and formed his government on Feb. 5, would be successful in this job, the polling of the "opinion leaders" showed the following results: 45.5 per cent expected him to "succeed to a large extent"; 34.5 per cent "to a certain extent"; 5.5 per cent "to a minor degree"; and 2.7 per cent expected him "not to succeed." On whether the government "was believed able to shoulder responsibilities of the next stage," the "opinion leaders" were divided according to the following categories: To a large extent: 30.1 per cent; to a certain degree: 46.9 per cent; to a minor degree: 4.7 per cent; to not succeed 4.2 per cent.

'People want change'

By Abdullah Hasanat
THE RESULTS of the opinion poll conducted by the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies that were released yesterday show clearly that the people have more confidence in the prime minister, Abdul Karim Kabariti, than his colleagues in the new Cabinet. However, the majority of those polled appears to think that both the prime minister and his colleagues would be able, albeit to varying degrees, to shoulder the responsibilities of the coming era. "This indicates that the people want change on the one hand, and are willing to give the new government a chance to deliver," according to Mustafa Hamarneh, the director of the centre.

Israel seals off two West Bank towns

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (R) — The Israeli army on Monday sealed the Palestinian-ruled West Bank towns of Ramallah and Qalqilya, an army spokeswoman said. The closure was imposed "for security reasons," the spokeswoman said without elaborating. Military sources said the reason was to stop Palestinians throwing stones at Israeli vehicles. "Under the closure, residents of the city will be forbidden to exit and the entrance of Israelis will be forbidden," the spokeswoman said of Ramallah. She said the restriction began on Monday at 5 a.m. (0300 GMT) until further notice. Israeli occupation forces left the towns last December and redeployed outside them under a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Although travel through Israeli and Palestinian controlled areas in the West Bank has been fairly smooth since the transition, closures have been imposed on several places in the last few days. On Saturday Israel sealed the town of Nablus because of a large anti-Israeli rally. On Sunday Palestinian police barred Israelis from entering Bethlehem because of a dispute over control of a road leading to a Jewish holy site. On the last three Fridays, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israel severely restricted entrance by Muslims to Occupied Jerusalem where mass prayers were held at holy sites. The army said restrictions imposed on Friday on the entrance of Palestinians from self-ruled Gaza into Israel were still in effect.

Arafat sworn in as 1st Palestinian president

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AFP) — Capping his triumph at the polls last month, Yasser Arafat took the oath of office Monday as the first elected Palestinian president, pledging to defend his people's "national ambitions." Holding his right hand on a copy of the Holy Koran, Mr. Arafat told a gathering in the hall that will soon house the new Palestinian legislative council: "I swear before God that I will be sincere to the country and preserve the constitution, law and interests of the Palestinian people." The swearing-in ceremony was only announced on Sunday and took place in front of a crowd of 100 people made up primarily of ministers and politicians close to Mr. Arafat and senior officers of the security forces. It started minutes after officials hung up a picture of Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque — the symbol of Palestinian claims of sovereignty over the holy city — behind the raised platform where Arafat took the oath of office. There was no participation in the ceremony by leaders of the Islamic opposition or prominent independent Palestinian politicians. Only a few members of the newly-elected legislative council were invited to attend, including Imad Fajuri, a former Hamas leader who broke with the Islamic movement to turn for election on the list of Mr. Arafat's Fateh organisation. Representatives of Egypt, Jordan and Qatar also attended. The brief, hastily-organised ceremony came as part of what Mr. Arafat's advisers have repeatedly termed "the transformation from revolutionary legitimacy to constitutional legitimacy." It paves the way for the convening late this month of the 88-member legislative council, most of whose representatives come from Mr. Arafat's Fateh faction or are personally loyal to him. The process began with the 1994 creation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to manage autonomy first in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho and before it then spread late last year to other West Bank population centres. It later led to the Jan. 20 elections, the establishment of new governmental institutions and the drafting of a basic law designed to serve as the basis for a future constitution for a Palestinian state. "Support this man, support Yasser Arafat," said Salim Zaun, the acting president of the PLO parliament in exile, the Palestine National Council (PNC), who presided over the ceremony alongside the head of the Muslim religious courts, Mohammad Abu Sardana, and Qasbi Al Ahadieh, the Palestinian chief justice. Mr. Arafat, who won 87 per cent of the vote in the Jan. 20 poll, pledged in his swearing-in oath to protect the integrity of Palestinians' lands "and to achieve their aspirations and national ambitions." In a hushed voice, he read out Koranic verses dealing with the weight of leadership responsibility. "May God help me in carrying out my responsibilities," he said. "This is an historic and new day," Mr. Arafat told AFP following the ceremony. "This is the start of the Palestinian independent state." Faisal Hussein, a top Arafat aide who handles Jerusalem affairs for the PNA, expressed confidence after the ceremony that Palestinians would fulfil their pledge to remove references to Israel's destruction from the PLO covenant. But he said such action would be backed provided Israel releases remaining Palestinian prisoners in its jails, curbs Jewish settlement activity in Palestinian areas and enables safe passage between the Palestinian-controlled areas of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. "If the Israeli government does something to clarify these matters it will help us a lot to change the charter," he said. Meanwhile, Mr. Arafat sought Egypt's help in resolving a dispute with Israel over the construction of an airport in the Gaza Strip, a top Arafat aide said Monday. Nabil Abu Rudeina said Mr. Arafat called Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa late Sunday after an armed confrontation between Palestinian police and Israeli soldiers who tried to halt work on the airfield near the Rafah crossing in the southern Gaza Strip. "President Hosni Mubarak called Arafat back and pledged to help resolve the airport problem," Mr. Rudeina said. Palestinian workers began levelling ground on Saturday for a runway at Rafah, the main crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, despite Israeli charges that construction of the airfield is a violation of the Israeli-Palestinian autonomy accords. Israeli soldiers were dispatched to the site to halt the work and Palestinian police pulled out their weapons in a confrontation which Israeli radio said was defused only after senior officers from both sides intervened.

Uri Savir arrives for talks

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter
AMMAN — The director general of the Israeli foreign ministry, Uri Savir arrived here last night for talks with His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti and Minister of Planning Rima Khalat. The visit, the first by a high-level Israeli official since mid-January when the two countries finalised all bilateral agreements stipulated by the peace treaty, is "essentially a follow-up on the implementation of the agreements," Israeli embassy sources told the Jordan Times. "The basic purpose of the visit is to talk about bilateral matters, economic ties and how to forward joint projects," said Israeli embassy press attaché, Shalom Tourgeman. "They will be discussing, generally, tools to make projects move forward, especially those in the Dead Sea, Aqaba-Eilat and Jordan Rift Valley," Mr. Tourgeman said. He added that he expected Mr. Savir, also head of the delegation negotiating with Syria, would update the Jordanian leaders on progress in negotiations with Syria, expected to resume later this month in Washington. Mr. Savir is accompanied by the director general of the Israeli ministry of finance, David Brudet.

Peres begins bid for early elections

TEL AVIV (R) — Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres asked for the dissolution of parliament on Monday to allow for early elections on May 21 that are likely to be overshadowed by the ghost of Yitzhak Rabin.

The government presented four bills to enable the dissolving of the 120-member Knesset and the holding of voting for both parliament and the first direct election of a prime minister.

Mr. Peres was scheduled to meet his main rival, right-wing Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu at 7 p.m. (1700 GMT) to fix a final date. The Knesset will then pass

the legislation. Mr. Peres said he preferred May 21 but would try to accommodate the opposition.

Mr. Peres, 72, wants an election as quickly as possible to catch the ebbing tide of sympathy from the November assassination of Prime Minister Rabin.

Opinion polls put Peres 22 points ahead of Mr. Netanyahu, who is still trying to shake off the left-wing charge of moral complicity in the assassination.

The entire right wing was accused of creating the climate of violence that led right-wing Jew Yigal Amir to shoot Mr. Rabin to stop peace deals with the Palestinians.

Mr. Peres' lead is narrow-

ing and now that a breakthrough with Syria before the summer seems remote he wants a snap poll, although Israeli law insists on a minimum 90-day campaign.

A long campaign would also increase Mr. Peres' exposure to attacks on Israel's Islamic opponents of his peace partner the PLO.

Announcing his decision on Sunday night, Mr. Peres said he wanted to "renew the government's mandate and mine". Mr. Peres failed four times to lead the Labour Party to an election victory. He was prime minister for two years in the 1980s only under a power-sharing deal with Likud

and became leader this time after Mr. Rabin's death.

In his brief address, Mr. Peres sketched out the main issues of his campaign — concluding peace with Palestinians, a treaty with Syria, Israeli security, and an improved economy. But he left little doubt that his campaign would be built on Mr. Rabin, whose name he invoked 10 times.

He hopes Mr. Rabin's strong security credentials, a sure vote winner in Israel, will rub off on him.

Mr. Rabin's widow, Leah, joined the fray on Monday saying her husband's memory would ensure a Labour victory although she ruled out a

political role for herself.

"I think that his memory and accomplishments are strong enough to lead the Labour Party to a crushing victory in these elections and they don't need me," she told Israel radio.

Likud said Mr. Rabin's death should be above politics.

"It pained me to hear the prime minister begin his address with a detailed and long reference to the difficult moments of the assassination," said Likud member of parliament Moshe Karzav. "Rabin's murder is a national tragedy, not a party matter," he told Reuters.

Syria slams Israeli right

DAMASCUS (R) — Syria slammed Israel's right-wing parties on Monday for opposing a return of captured land in Syria and expressed hope that early elections in Israel would contribute to achieving a just peace in the region.

Syria's official press said the credibility of any new Israeli government would be decided by its response to the "requirements of peace", especially the principle of swapping land for peace.

"The elections are an internal Israeli affair, but what we hope is that its results would contribute to making a just and comprehensive peace," the official daily Tishreen said.

There is no doubt that the Israeli rightist forces with their new alliances are seeking to undermine the peace process, a move which contradicts the sincere and constructive efforts aimed at achieving peace under the land-for-peace principle," it said.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, hoping to capitalise on sympathy for his assassinated predecessor Yitzhak Rabin, on Sunday announced that elections would be held in May. This is earlier than the latest possible date of October.

He hopes to widen his Labour Party's wafer-thin

majority in parliament and beat his Likud Party opponent Benjamin Netanyahu who opposes the return of the Golan Heights to Syria as part of a peace deal.

Mr. Peres had indicated that he would be ready for a pullback from the Golan but would not reveal the scope and timing.

Syria's peace talks with Israel received a new push when Mr. Peres took over as prime minister. Both parties reported progress at peace talks which resumed in the United States in December after a six-month break.

The Syrian-Israeli peace talks which opened over four years ago are stalled over the fate of the Golan, captured by Israel from Syria in 1967, future ties and security arrangements.

Syria says Israel to withdraw fully from the Golan and says security arrangements which would back up a peace deal should be equal and balanced.

Israel says it will not reveal the extent of a pullback from the Golan until Syria agrees to establish full normal ties with it.

A new round of talks between Syria and Israel will be held Feb. 26 in Maryland, near Washington. But diplomats expect no major progress until the end of the Israeli elections.

Palestinians clash with PLO police in Nablus

NABLUS (R) — Palestinians clashed with PLO police in the West Bank city of Nablus on Sunday when a family brawl was joined by hundreds of people venting anger against the police, witnesses said on Monday.

Palestinian sources said 10 people were bruised and hospitalised but no bullet injuries were reported.

The sources said residents complained the police that entered the town just two months ago when Israeli occupation forces withdrew mistreated them and humiliated them. The police were welcomed as heroes when

they arrived in December. Hundreds of people demonstrated in the city's centre and surrounded the police station, throwing stones and chanting anti-police, anti-Palestinian authority slogans. Police, trapped in their headquarters, shot bullets in the air in an attempt to disperse protesters.

Witnesses said PLO officials appealed for calm through mosque loudspeakers.

Nablus Mayor Ghassan Al Shaka, speaking from the self-ruled Gaza Strip after meeting PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said: "There were no people injured, but the incident was a popular reaction to the performance of

some police officers and was exploited by some elements to escalate tensions."

He told Reuters he was returning to Nablus later in the day to start an investigation ordered by Mr. Arafat.

Nablus, the largest West Bank city, known as its commercial centre, was one of six major cities handed over from Israel to the PLO in December last year.

PLO police from all over the West Bank and Gaza Strip were deployed in Nablus. Residents complained that police, unfamiliar with the nature of the city and its lifestyle, humiliated people and treated them like enemies.



ARAFAT TAKES OATH OF PRESIDENCY: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat with his right hand on a Koran takes the oath of president Monday, three weeks after his landslide victory in the first Palestinian general elections. He took the oath at the podium in the building which will house the 88-member legislative council, and said: "I swear by Almighty God to be faithful to the homeland, uphold the constitution and the law and maintain the interests of the Palestinian people and the integrity of its land and to achieve its national aspirations and God is my witness" (See from page story) (Reuters photo)

Islamists arrest Somali politician

MOGADISHU (R) — Islamic militiamen on Monday arrested a senior Somali politician opposed to north Mogadishu warlord Ali Mahdi Mohamed after shelling his house and killing one of his bodyguards, witnesses said.

Dozens of militiamen swooped on the house of Abdulrahman Gabow Mohamed in north Mogadishu's Karan district. They shelled the house, killed one of Mr.

Mohamed's bodyguards and arrested the politician who was appointed last week by south Mogadishu warlord Mohamed Farah Aideded as deputy president in his self-styled government, the witnesses said.

Gen. Aideded's radio station said on Friday Mohamed and five other politicians of the Aghal clan, which usually supports his chief rival Ali Mahdi, had switched sides and were appointed to senior positions in Gen. Aideded's

government.

On Saturday Mohamed and one of the other five Aghals, Hassan Abdulle Goley, called a news conference in north Mogadishu to deny they had defected to Gen. Aideded.

Mr. Mohamed said they were members of a group set up last month by opponents of Ali Mahdi.

"We're neutral and we want to keep our neutrality among the warring factions of Somalia," he said.

Iraqi held in Kuwait for forging papers

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait police have arrested an Iraqi woman who worked in the Gulf state as a Kuwaiti government lawyer and accused her of forging nationality papers, an official said on Monday.

The Iraqi woman, Layla Hussein, has been arrested for forging documents to obtain Kuwaiti nationality, the official, who declined to be identified, told Reuters.

"She worked with the interior ministry and the general prosecution as a Kuwaiti national."

The official was asked about an Al Watan newspaper report on Monday which said Ms. Hussein was also accused of spying for Iraq.

He said he had no further details about the case.

The paper said authorities on Thursday arrested the 45-year-old woman, who was a widow of an Iraqi army colonel.

It said officers searching her house found "political publications about Kuwait's internal affairs."

No large scale attack on Kabul — Uzbek warlord

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Afghanistan's powerful Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum on Monday ruled out a coordinated assault on the Afghan capital by rebel factions trying to topple President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government.

"We will not fight for Kabul again. We don't believe that is the answer," said Mohammad Piandaa, a spokesman for Gen. Dostum, who is in Pakistan to meet with other rebel leaders.

Gen. Dostum's ally and former Afghan Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar on Sunday called on neighbouring Pakistan to mediate a summit of warring Afghan leaders to try to find a negotiated end to the civil war that has ruined Kabul.

Meanwhile, in the Afghan capital Mr. Rabbani condemned Pakistani for hosting opposition talks.

In a state-run radio Kabul broadcast Sunday, Mr. Rabbani issued an open invitation to his opponents to hold talks in the Afghan

capital, an invitation no one is likely to accept.

Gen. Dostum, a general in the former communist army, teamed up with Mr. Hekmatyar in 1994 in a ferocious 11-month assault on the Afghan capital.

When the worst of the fighting was over Mr. Rabbani's troops were still in control of the city and its environs.

Since then Gen. Dostum and Mr. Hekmatyar's forces have pulled back and been replaced by the fundamentalist Taliban militia, who are demanding Mr. Rabbani resign and a strict Islamic government be imposed in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, who entered the fray about two years ago as an alternative to the warring factions, have dug themselves in around Kabul. They been daily lobbing rockets on the beleaguered capital.

So far the Taliban have refused to participate in the talks being held in Pakistan, largely because of Gen. Dostum, who they revile for his communist past.

Iran urged to mend ties with Gulf Arab countries

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Iran should stop interfering in the internal affairs of its Gulf Arab neighbours to end tension in their relations and stabilise the oil-rich region, a senior Gulf official said on Monday.

Sheikh Fahim Al Qassimi, secretary general of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), said a statement last week by the Iranian embassy in Kuwait about riots in Bahrain was designed to incite more violence.

"The statement included an incitement for sedition

and support for a minority of perpetrators of acts of sabotage in Bahrain. This is a flagrant interference in the internal affairs of a GCC member," he told the official United Arab Emirates (UAE) agency WAM.

"GCC states are keen to maintain good links with the Islamic Republic of Iran on the basis of good neighbourliness, refraining from all forms of interference in internal affairs and respect for the sovereignty, independence and integrity of all regional states."

"Iran should translate its

stated desire to develop relations with the GCC into action."

The Iranian embassy in Kuwait said last week that 14 months of political unrest in Bahrain was due to discrimination by the Sunni-led government in Manama against the country's Shiite Muslim majority.

Bahrain had earlier accused Iran of involvement in the unrest in the Gulf island nation.

Iran's ties with the GCC are already strained over its island dispute with the UAE

and political and ideological differences with Saudi Arabia.

Tehran has said it wants good relations with its Gulf neighbours and has blamed Western interference and presence in the Gulf for the tension.

A U.S. navy commander raised GCC fears last week about Iranian intentions, saying the Islamic republic had largely bolstered its military power and was now capable of blocking the strategic Hormuz Straits, the only Gulf gateway through which nearly one

fifth of world oil exports pass.

"Iran should take steps that will contribute to creating a climate of tranquility and strengthen confidence to boost relations and consolidate security and stability in this vital region," Sheikh Fahim said.

The GCC groups Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the UAE in a loose economic, defence and political alliance created nine months after the outbreak of the 1980-1988 conflict between Iran and Iraq.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 77311-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 Captain Planet
14:30 Johnny Quest
14:50 The Happy Professor
15:00 Spirit of Adventure
15:40 Scientific Eye
16:10 Okavango
17:00 Magazine — Planet En Equitation
17:30 Serie — Les Compagnons De L'Adventure
18:00 Medical Magazine — Savoir Plus
19:00 Magazine — L'histoire
19:15 Magazine — L'histoire
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 You Bet Your Life
20:00 Doc — Oriental Rug
20:25 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
21:10 Oran — Harry
22:00 News In English
22:25 Three Sovereigns from Sarah
23:15 Feature Film: "Death in Small Towns"

PRAYER TIMES

04:59 Fajr
06:17 Sunrise
11:50 Dhuhr
14:59 Asr
17:23 Maghrib
18:14 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Switfeld, Tel. 810707
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 634590
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terresanta Church Tel. 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541
Anglican Church Tel. 652326
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Armenian International Church Tel. 625236
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 624328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 678991
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to rise becoming above average with clouds appearing at different altitudes with winds easterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly,

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

EMERGENCIES

Fixed Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Emergency 630341
Rescue Police 192, 631111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617111
Blood Bank 781121
Highway Police 634302
Traffic Police 661111
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 661111
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage
Complaints 661111
Amman Municipality
Complaints 767111
Telephone Information
(directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 110220
Central Amman Telephone
Reprints 623111
Abdullah Television Repairs 661111
Jordan Television 731111
Radio Jordan 771111
Water Authority 661111
Jordan Electricity Authority
Complaints 815615
Electric Power
Complaints 636361
RJ Flight Information 186-5320
Queen Alia Int. Airport 186-5320

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Dr. Ramzi Mzawi 894708
Dr. Mukhlis Alazab 820425
Dr. Khalid Maabdi 743591
Dr. Ghazi Abu Sheikha 752405
Ferdous pharmacy 776336
Al Asma pharmacy 637055
Naimukh pharmacy 637055
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shemkani pharmacy 637660
Naimukh pharmacy 637672
Najih pharmacy 847602

IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu 261741
Alqah pharmacy 1-1

ZARQA:
Dr. Walid Halaweh 962799
Khalitah pharmacy 985417

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
(Terminal 1)
04:05 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
06:15 Beirut (RJ)
08:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:00 Madrid, Casablanca (RJ)
11:05 Montreal, Toronto (RJ)
11:25 Vienna, Frankfurt (RJ)
11:25 Geneva, Brussels (RJ)
12:00 Paris (RJ)
12:05 London (RJ)
12:15 Cairo (RJ)
12:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
12:30 Omsk, Larnaca (RJ)
20:30 Abu Dhabi, Doha (RJ)
21:00 Abu Dhabi, Jakarta (add) (RJ)
22:05 Kuala Lumpur, Singapore (RJ)

OTHER FLIGHTS (Terminal 2)

13:10 Aden, Huddah (DY)
13:10 Frankfurt (YP)
14:20 Rome (AZ)
14:55 Munich (LH)
16:15 Dubai (EK)
20:40 Beirut (ME)
21:40 Amsterdam (KL)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
01:10 London (BA)

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by

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(Terminal 1)
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20:40 Beirut (ME)
21:40 Amsterdam (KL)
00:55 Bucharest (RO)
01:10 London (BA)

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by

ARRIVALS

Royal Wings (RW) Flights
(Marka Airport)
07:00 Amman (RW)
08:00 Amman (RW)
HUAZ RAILWAY TRAIN
Dep. Amman 8:00 every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper lower price in fils per kg.

Apple 700/300
Banana 600/200
Banana (Mukammal) 530/250
Banana (imported) 630/600
Cabbage 60/140
Carrot 180/100
Cauliflower 170/100
Cucumbers (large) 250/100
Cucumbers (small) 250/100
Eggplant 300/150
Garlic 100/300
Lemon 300/250
Marrow (large) 120/80
Marrow (small) 220/120
Onion (green) 140/100
Onion (dry) 210/150
Orange 600/300
Parsley (fresh) 500/100
Pepper (imported) 840/400
Potato 200/150
Rudish 100/50

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Alia Art Galler
Engravings
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Printmaking
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HRH Crown Prince Hassan Monday meets with Roman Catholic Patriarch Michel Sabbah to discuss religious programmes, interfaith dialogue and promoting spirituality in youth (Petra photo)

Crown Prince, Catholic patriarch review spiritual revival programmes

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Monday met in his office with Jerusalem-based Patriarch Michel Sabbah, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Jordan and Palestine.

The patriarch spoke with Prince Hassan about the Catholic Church's programmes and its innovative activities geared particularly for youth to promote religious ethics and enlighten

the young on spiritual matters.

Prince Hassan reviewed several areas of his work in promoting inter-faith dialogue and praised the Arab Christian churches for their contributions towards advancing spiritual life and culture.

Patriarch Sabbah later met Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kaburiti and reviewed various issues pertaining to the status of

Jerusalem and the rights of the followers of the three monotheistic religions in that city.

Both sides stressed that the holy city should be an open meeting place for all faiths.

Present at the meeting were Roman Catholic Bishop Salim Sayegh and Monsignor Raouf Najjar, secretary of the embassy of the Holy See in Jordan.

National Task Force for Children completes draft strategy, official

AMMAN (J.T.) — The National Task Force for the Children (NTFC), headed by Her Majesty Queen Noor, and made up of several officials and specialists working with other grass roots children's organisations have just completed drafting a national strategy for the children.

According to a NTFC official, as soon as the members of task force approve the draft, it will be adopted by the ministries of education and social development as well as the different organisations working with children's issues.

"In four months the strategy will be implemented," said Muna Tagy.

Ms. Tagy told the Jordan

Times that the NTFC, which had been working for the last four months on identifying and assessing children's suffering and conditions, has drafted a practical strategy which will also take into consideration the Arab and international conventions on the rights of children.

Sari Nasser, a sociologist and member in the NTFC, told the Jordan Times that the task force is just a step in the right direction as Jordan has only begun to research what children are doing and what their problems are.

He stressed the strategy will provide a model for a better environment especially that the majority of

the Jordanian population are under 15.

As for the need to amend present laws and introduce new ones concerning child rights and the consideration by Parliament of a draft law which would allow the authorities to take an abused child away from his family, Dr. Nasser said that the NTFC will first work to change unfortunate attitudes and negative values which harm children. That, he said, will "be carried out through the mass media and literature."

At a later stage, Dr. Nasser said lobbying could be done to change or amend the law.

JEDCO prepares for '96 international trade fairs

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordanian Exports Development and Commercial Centres Corporation (JEDCO) is planning for Jordan's participation in trade fairs in several Arab and foreign countries as well as its own single country trade fairs in other countries during 1996.

A JEDCO statement Monday said that Jordan will be taking part in the International Middle East Trade Fair to be held in Dubai towards the end of February, the Cairo International Fair early next month, the Berlin International Fair towards the

end of March, the Damascus International Fair in September, the Tehran International Fair early in October, the Islamic Trade Fair in Jakarta at the end of October, the Baghdad International Fair early in November and the Dakar International Fair at the end of November.

Minister pledges to help farmers, increase agricultural exports

AMMAN (Petra) — While visiting Amman's central produce market Monday, Minister of Agriculture Mustafa Shneikat said the ministry is determined to help farmers with their problems and in so doing reduce random production of certain crops which has resulted in unneeded surplus.

Dr. Shneikat said that the ministry will also push for the largest possible export volumes of produce.

Talking at the central market with a group of farmers, middlemen and merchants, Dr. Shneikat said the ministry was studying ways of preventing bottlenecks in production, adding that many of the problems facing exports were external.

He said he hoped that the problems that prevented

marketing of some products in neighbouring Arab states would soon be resolved.

According to Dr. Shneikat, random farming and disregard for the rules of grading and packing of produce are some major reasons for problems in the agricultural sector.

He suggested that farmers grow cereals and animal feed to help solve the problem of marketing crops abroad, rather than continue to grow tomatoes, which, he said are difficult to store, as well as other produce which are always in surplus.

According to Agricultural Marketing Organisation Director General Salem Lawzi, who accompanied the minister on the tour, the present decline of produce prices has been the result of a bumper crop.



The central produce market in Amman (file photo)

'Interior ministry to open channels of communication with political parties'

Proposed internal control bureau to hear citizens' complaints - Khleifat

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Interior Awad Khleifat Monday instructed his staff to open channels of communication and maintain contacts with various Jordanian political parties regardless of their political orientations.

Every party is a partner in the process of building the nation under the Hashemite leadership, the Jordanian Constitution and the National Charter, said the minister.

The coming stage in the ministry's policy, he said, will be marked with openness towards all parties, with the purpose of deepening the roots of democracy in a manner that would ensure no encroachment on Jordan's stability and the rule of the law which will be applied to all indiscriminately.

Dr. Khleifat also instructed the officials to open the doors for contacts with the public and to hear citizens' grievances and demands without bias.

Addressing the meeting, attended by heads of sections and directors of departments, Dr. Khleifat

said that in implementation of His Majesty King Hussein's directives the Ministry of Interior has decided to create an internal control bureau chaired by a judge to help address any previous ministry excesses. He said the bureau will also be charged with receiving and examining public complaints.

Referring to the question of Jordanian passports and citizenship, Dr. Khleifat said that every Jordanian has the right to a passport regardless of his or her origin, as provided for in the

Constitution. Therefore, he said, the ministry will draft a new set of regulations and rules to help address the cases of citizens who were unfairly treated.

Dr. Khleifat said plans to convene a meeting with provincial governors soon to discuss public concerns in the governorates, adding that he was planning to grant governors additional authorities to deal with cases in their respective regions.

Awad Khleifat



Law on JPA should be amended to fit the times, says Qudah

AMMAN (Petra) — President of the Jordanian Press Association (JPA) Sulaiman Qudah Monday said he hoped that the Lower House of Parliament will introduce amendments to the JPA law of 1983 in order to plug gaps in it and upgrade it to meet with developments in the profession over the last 13 years.

Noting that the House is due to begin examining the law Saturday, Mr. Qudah said there is an urgent need for revising the provisions of the law particularly concerning the conditions for JPA membership.

He said Jordan has a great

number of people practising journalism even though they do not meet the requirements for JPA membership according to the present law.

Over the past 13 years, he said, Jordan witnessed numerous political developments which have had their impact on the journalism profession, and therefore the law should be amended accordingly.

He said the amendments to the JPA law should also look into means for increasing the association's resources.

JBA forwards names of new defence team in 'Bay' at Al Imam

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Jordan Bar Association (JBA) forwarded, for the second time, names of seven defence attorneys for 13 people accused of sabotage, after five of the original seven attorneys appointed by the association withdrew from the case, State Security Presiding Judge Hafez Amin said.

The newly appointed attorneys are Mazen Ershaidat, Abdul Ghafar Abu Khalaf, Faisal Baiayneh, Issam Yassin, Mohamad Najib Silawi,

Ahmad Sheikh Salem, Mohammad Housh and Asma Khader who was already appointed by one of the defendants.

The group, known as Bay'at Al Imam (pledge of allegiance), is charged with slandering against His Majesty King Hussein and illegal possession and manufacturing of explosive materials.

During a three-hour court session, Judge Amin said the previous five defence attorneys withdrew because of a dispute with some of their clients.

On Jan. 2, two months after the trial was postponed indefinitely, the

defendants agreed that they would cooperate with the newly appointed lawyers.

Some of the group members had repeatedly rejected to appoint attorneys to defend them in the past, charging that they did not believe in the court's justice system.

The group, who were dismissed three times from the courtroom for interrupting the court session, said they would defend themselves or God will decide their fate.

The court will resume hearings on March 20.

WHAT'S GOING ON

CONCERTS

- * Musical performance by the Christian Youth Club at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:30 p.m.
- * Concert by Maghnirah at the Phoenix Gallery, Gardens Street, at 8:30 p.m. (Tel 095-291)

PLAY

- * "Ramadan Supermarket," (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

- * Abstract (plastic) art by Mirvat Emile Wahhab at the Housing Bank Complex Gallery (until March 5).
- * Paintings by Jordanian and other Arab artists at Alia Art Gallery (until March 5).
- * Engravings by French artists at the French Cultural Centre (until Feb. 29).
- * Printmaking and paintings by Yasser Dweik at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh. Also displaying paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists (until Feb. 18).

A census reveals too much for some

By Jack Redden
Reuters

AMMAN — As uneasy governments across the Middle East know, a national census can reveal much more about the people living in a country than just their total number.

"The state decided that the classification of this data is against the public interest and will not settle the issue," Abdul Hadi Alaween, head of Jordan's Department of Statistics, told reporters seeking the number of Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

"On the contrary, it will only create confusion," he said at last month's unveiling of 1994 census results that drew more attention for conspicuous omissions than for what was included.

In Jordan, among the most sensitive issues is the ratio between traditional Jordanian families from the area east of the Jordan River and the Palestinians who arrived over that river

in successive waves of refugees from the conflict with the Jews.

Estimates of Jordan's Palestinian population range from official suggestions of a slight minority to widespread suspicions that they are a substantial majority.

The census recorded the birthplaces of everyone's parents and grandparents to establish family origins, igniting rumours that Palestinians were an overwhelming majority.

For the present at least, the public will not know.

The number of Palestinian Jordanians, a group that dominates the business community, will not be released by the government, which is dominated by "East Bank" Jordanians.

Such sensitivity is not unique to Jordan. Across the region there are awkward questions about the numbers of ethnic and religious groups that govern-

ments feel are best left unanswered.

In Bahrain, where more than a year of protests against the Sunni Muslim-ruled government have come mainly from the island's majority Shi'ite Muslims, distinctions between the main branches of Islam are not reposed in the census.

There is also no breakdown given between Sunnis and Shi'ites in nearby Saudi Arabia, where Shi'ites are assumed to be the largest group in the northeast of the Sunni-ruled kingdom richly endowed with oil.

Kuwait's April 1995 census conceded that 1.18 million of the country's 1.37 million people are foreigners — a common situation in the wealthy but thinly populated Gulf where workers have to be imported.

But diplomats say Kuwait's figure ignores a further 120,000 people the government labels illegal

aliens, or "bedouns," as they are commonly known in Kuwait, even though several thousand are in the army and police. If they had official status, Kuwait would have to give them access to its lavish welfare system.

There is no need for Lebanon to conceal the information revealed by its latest census — it was done 63 years ago when the country was still under French control.

That census found the Christians, France's key allies, were the largest religious group in the country by a small margin. That secured their right to have the presidency, while a Sunni Muslim held the post of prime minister — an arrangement that continues to this day.

Even if the 1933 census was correct at the time, it is unlikely to reflect reality after six decades that included a vicious 15-year civil war on sectarian lines.

That conflict caused many Christians to emigrate, with some estimating that they are now only 30-35 per cent of the population.

That civil war also showed that the poor Shi'ites — a rural population, accorded little say in sharing out offices after the 1933 census — are now probably Lebanon's single biggest group.

The unifying aspect to these awkward statistics is the questions it could raise about the legitimacy of those currently in power.

Rulers drawn from minorities are quite common, whether President Saddam Hussein from the minority Sunnis of Iraq or President Hafez Al Assad of Syria's small Alawite sect of Islam.

It is not surprising or new. While the Arab-Israeli conflict has popularly oversimplified the region into a Jewish state surrounded by a Muslim sea, the Middle East has long been a com-

plex mosaic of religious and ethnic groups.

The horde of census takers who scoured Jordan in 1994 took down detailed information about far more than the number of residents descended from Palestinians.

They also, for instance, recorded the number of Jordanians of Circassian descent, a small but influential Muslim group who arrived from the Caucasus a century ago.

It also counted the 2,000-year-old Christian community, a holy disputed number that some believe has dwindled to well under five percent of the population.

The published census figures will not settle the question.

Although seats in parliament are reserved for Circassians and Christians on the assumption it reflects their portion of the society, their numbers in Jordan were deleted.

British police say IRA may strike again; politicians split

LONDON (R) — British police gave a warning that Northern Irish guerrillas could strike again "any time, anywhere" as thousands of people returned to work in London's bomb-devastated Docklands financial district Monday.

Police were still sifting glass and debris for clues in five buildings wrecked by Friday's half-tonne bomb that killed two people and injured more than 100 in a dramatic end to a 17-month-long IRA ceasefire.

After a frantic weekend of political meetings, a serious split opened up between the British and Irish governments over how to resume the difficult search for a permanent peace in Northern Ireland.

Britain made clear it wanted to push ahead with a controversial plan to hold new elections in Northern Ireland before starting full-scale peace talks.

The election plan, which was viewed by Irish Repub-

licans as a British attempt to stall talks, is widely thought to have triggered Friday's resumption of violence after months of political stalemate.

The Dublin government said bluntly that pursuing the election idea was a mistake.

"I believe the idea of having an election of the kind suggested immediately after the resumption of violence would pour petrol on the flames. I think it would be a serious mistake," Irish Prime Minister John Bruton said Sunday.

Gerry Adams, leader of the IRA's political wing Sinn Fein, accused the British government of bad faith, dishonesty and negativity in the 17 months since the truce.

"The British government and the Unionists erected one obstacle after another to frustrate every attempt to sit down around the negotiating table," Mr. Adams wrote in the Guardian newspaper

Monday.

"We have witnessed bad faith and dishonesty, new preconditions, stalling, negativity and provocation," Mr. Adams added.

Dublin is still pressing its new idea of "proximity talks" based on meetings held in Dayton, Ohio last year that led to a peace agreement for ex-Yugoslavia. Sinn Fein wants all-party peace talks to be held as soon as possible.

Security was tightened in London and Belfast following the bomb which is estimated to have wrecked about one million square feet (93,000 sq metres) of office space in the Docklands area in East London. Provisional estimates put damage at about £100 million (\$153 million).

Police carrying automatic weapons patrolled roads into the area and roadblocks were back in place in London's most important financial district, the city.

Police were hoping to use close circuit television footage from security cameras to help their hunt for the bombers.

The Times newspaper reported Monday that Britain's M15 security service had warned of renewed IRA violence but did not expect anything to happen before the beginning of March.

It quoted security sources in Dublin and London as saying the IRA's seven-member Provisional Army Council had voted to resume the bombing campaign to avert a split in the organisation. The IRA splintered in 1972 over the question of abandoning its guerrilla tactics for peace talks.

"It could well be the intention of the IRA to follow this with more attacks of a similar nature, at any time, anywhere," said Assistant Police Commissioner David Veness.

Pope returns from L. American trip

ROME (R) — Pope John Paul returned to Italy Monday at the end of a week-long visit to Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Venezuela, airport officials said.

The plane carrying the Pope from Caracas arrived at Rome's Ciampino Airport at 9:55 a.m. (0855 GMT). The visit was the 69th foreign trip the 75-year-old Pontiff has made since his election in 1978.

On Sunday, he had addressed a huge exuberant crowd of one million who turned out for the last mass of the trip at La Carota Airport in Caracas.

Rumours abounded that he started to feel unwell towards the end of the mass, but the Vatican denied them. Spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the "episode does not exist in any way".

As has been evident in all recent trips — and in the past week in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador — the Pope showed signs of age and walked more slowly, the lingering effects of a hip replacement in 1994.

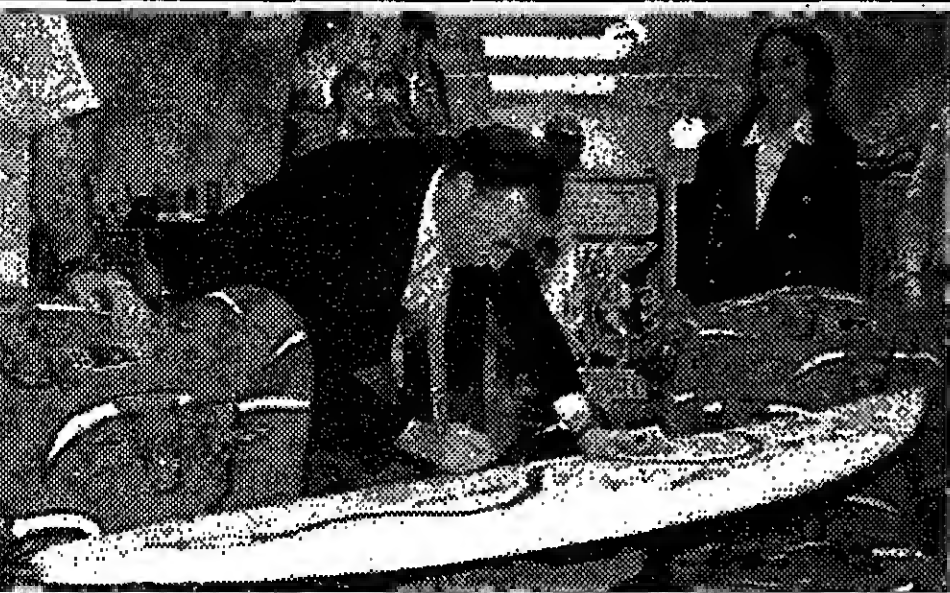
Nevertheless, Pope John Paul delivered a vigorous homily at the airport mass, denouncing the corruption of Venezuelan society.

Looking out on the cloud-shrouded Avila Mountain that overlooks Caracas, the Pope urged the mostly Catholic people of Venezuela to reject what he called the "idols of today," he said these included "materialism and selfishness and their consequences, sensualism, hedonism, violence and corruption."

Various sectors of society in Venezuela ranging from politicians to the judiciary have been accused of corruption.

In his homily, the Pope spoke of the people's yearnings for a renewal of Venezuelan society and the need to overcome the current crisis.

During his two days in Venezuela the Pope saw for himself grinding poverty. His motorcade often passed by shantytowns where barefoot children played near streams turned into open sewers.



Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating autographs a surfboard as his wife Annita (right) watches during a visit to the Mamba Factory in Sydney, makers of surf wear products, during his election campaign Monday. Polls claim Mr. Keating's Labour Party is falling further behind the Liberal-National Coalition parties for the March 2 election (Reuters photo)

Howard outbids Keating on health

BRISBANE (R) — Australian opposition leader John Howard, riding high in the opinion polls two weeks before a general election, displayed a new, kinder image Monday and outbid Prime Minister Paul Keating on promised health spending.

Mr. Howard, a conservative once firmly opposed to Australia's Medicare public health insurance system, said he would maintain Medicare and reinforce it with private health insurance incentives aimed at taking the strain off the public system.

"What this policy will do is to buttress both components," said Mr. Howard, who is favourite to win the March 2 ballot.

"It's a double-fisted defence of the complete health system," he told a news conference in the northern city of Brisbane.

Mr. Howard's health plan is crucial to his goal of ending 13 years of Labour rule. It is aimed at soothing fears that a conservative government would butcher the public health system.

Opinion polls consistently show health as a major election issue and that most voters want the public system retained.

The opposition's campaign pledge to scrap Medicare played a big part in its 1993 election defeat, its fifth consecutive loss despite Labour then presiding over a jobless rate of 11 per cent.

Mr. Howard has been at pains throughout the campaign to paint himself as a more moderate and much less threatening alternative than the opposition's 1993 leader, economist John Hewson.

In campaigning for the last elections, Mr. Keating attacked Mr. Hewson and his coalition of Liberal and National parties as right wing ideologues bent on slashing government spending and raising tax.

Mr. Keating then overcame a hefty poll deficit and all predictions to win the 1993

election. But now he trails even further behind, by almost nine percentage points, and faces an opponent offering far less radical policies.

Mr. Howard's health plan, which would cost 600 million Australian dollars (\$400 million) per year by 1998/99 (July/June), is the latest of a string of policies designed not to upset the electorate.

Labour has pledged to spend 440 million Australian dollars on health by 1998/99. Mr. Howard has pledged not to cut wages under his labour-market policy and to spend over 1 billion Australian dollars on the environment.

Mr. Keating has struggled to persuade voters that Mr. Howard is a hardline right-winger, failing again on Sunday night's televised showdown debate which Mr. Howard used to again assure voters he would not cut wages, raise taxes or destroy Medicare.

The host Channel 9 Network's studio audience gave Mr. Keating a narrow victory over Mr. Howard in the debate, the first of two to be showed live on TV, but newspaper polls gave it to Mr. Howard.

Mr. Keating awoke to more bad news earlier that day, when Labour's grip on power in the northern state of Queensland was effectively broken with the loss of vital support from an independent in the state parliament.

Sole independent MP Liz Cunningham said she would back the opposition conservative coalition, robbing Labour of its legislative majority.

Her move ended a deadlock after a Labour loss in a state seat by-election this month gave both Labour and the opposition 44 seats each. Labour now faces a no-confidence motion it is sure to lose when state parliament resumes in the next few weeks.

former press aide turns invective on Yeltsin

MOSCOW (R) — President Boris Yeltsin's sharp-tongued former press spokesman, Vyacheslav Kostikov, has quit as Russia's ambassador to the Vatican, accusing his old chief of being power-hungry and manipulative.

"Power is his concubine," said Mr. Kostikov in a television interview, finally turning his renowned invective against his old boss.

Russian news agencies Monday linked the 55-year-old Kostikov's resignation from the Vatican post to potentially explosive "kiss-and-tell" memoirs he has penned about his three years inside the Kremlin.

The memoirs, Parting With The President, have yet to be published. But in brief excerpts in a weekly newspaper Mr. Kostikov is particularly critical of the huge influence wielded inside the Kremlin by Mr. Yeltsin's personal bodyguard and eminence grise, General Alexander Korzhakov.

In a two-part interview screened on NTV independent television Sunday, Mr. Kostikov, while clearly retaining some admiration for his old boss, said the 65-year-old Kremlin leader had no real democratic instincts.

"He does not have his own democratic convictions and never did. He is first of all a man of power," Mr. Kostikov said in his interview in his study, with a photograph of himself and Mr. Yeltsin nearby on a small bureau.

"He is of course a man who knows how to dominate and likes to dominate. Power is his ideology, his friend, his concubine, his mistress, his passion," Mr. Kostikov said.

The Foreign Ministry would not confirm Mr. Kostikov's resignation from the Vatican post which he took up after stepping down as Mr. Yeltsin's press secretary in November 1994.

But Russian news agencies quoted the Foreign Ministry as saying his activities were "incompatible with his status as a diplomatic representative of Russia".

Mr. Kostikov, a former journalist, was the scourge of Mr. Yeltsin's political opponents during the three years he was the Kremlin leader's mouthpiece, referring to them on various occasions as "cockroaches" and "political scum".



South Korean students scuffle with riot police in front of the Japanese embassy in central Seoul on Monday as part of their demonstration to protest against Tokyo's claims that South Korea's easternmost Tokdo Islands belong to Japan (Reuters photo)

Seoul plans exercise near disputed islets

SEOUL (R) — South Korea will hold military exercises this month around islands whose ownership is disputed with Japan, the domestic Yonhap News Agency said Monday.

Yonhap, quoting Defence Ministry officials, said the navy and air force exercises would be held near Tokdo, two rocky islands which Japan calls Takeshima, this month and possibly as early as Wednesday.

Uneasy relations between Seoul and Tokyo worsened last week, with South Korean citizens' groups taking to the streets to protest against renewed Japanese claims to the islands.

About 30 masked representatives of the groups Monday burned the Japanese flag in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul after delivering a letter of protest.

About 100 protesters also held a noisy anti-Japanese rally in a Seoul park, waving banners denouncing Japan and urging Seoul to consider severing diplomatic ties.

Yonhap said the exercise would involve destroyers, high-speed patrol boats, anti-submarine helicopters and air force fighters.

A Defence Ministry spokesman declined to confirm the report. "We have not made any announcement on the exercise. The Defence Ministry and the Foreign Ministry are discussing the matter," he said without giving any details.

In an escalating row over the islands, members of parliament from Japan's ruling coalition parties Sunday called off a visit to Seoul after South Korean President Kim

Young-Sam cancelled a meeting with them.

Mr. Kim also threatened to scrap a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto during an Asia-Europe meeting of heads of government in Bangkok next month.

A South Korean family and a handful of marine police live on Tokdo, barren outcrops roughly halfway between the two countries.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda sparked Korean outrage last week by lodging a diplomatic protest against work begun by South Korea to improve a wharf on the islands. He again asserted sovereignty.

South Korea said it would go ahead with the work.

On Saturday a spokesman for President Kim branded Tokyo's claim to the islands "preposterous" and "intolerable" and said Japan was again "glorifying its past crimes".

The headline official response, just two months before general elections, plays well with a Korean public that is ultra-sensitive about Tokyo's brutal 35-year colonisation of the Korean peninsula that ended in 1945.

Japan has claimed the islands since 1905 when it signed an agreement with Korea that paved the way for colonisation. Seoul has stationed security police on the islands since 1954.

Seoul officials said Korean claims to the island dated back to the year 512 and were well-documented.

Rao under attack from opposition

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's main opposition party launched a harsh attack on Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao Monday, accusing him of attempting to cover up his role in the country's worst corruption scandal.

The Hindu-revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) described Mr. Rao, 74, as "a politician with not only a perverse mind but with hard criminal habits."

BJP spokesman Krishan Lal Sharma said the premier was trying to prevent the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) from probing charges that he also took bribes from Surenra Jain, a businessman at the heart of the scandal.

"The PM is covering up his misdeeds," Mr. Sharma told AFP. "He is vindictive towards the opposition. A man who started (off in 1991) with a pledge to pursue the politics of consensus is now bent upon total confrontation."

"He is confronting everybody, the opposition as well as colleagues in his own party," Mr. Sharma said.

It was one of the harshest attacks on Mr. Rao by the BJP, whose President Lal Krishna Advani has been accused by the CBI of accepting huge bribes from Mr. Jain, the key figure behind the \$21-million scandal.

Mr. Advani, who quit parliament follow-

ing the allegation, has denied charges of taking money from Mr. Jain, who allegedly paid bribes to 115 top politicians of all shades, as well as bureaucrats, between 1988 and 1991.

The scandal has stunned India, and is expected to cost almost all political parties heavily in general elections expected in April. Most analysts believe the nationwide ballot will result in a hung parliament.

Mr. Jain has alleged that he also gave money to Mr. Rao shortly after he became prime minister in June 1991, but did not enter his name in two diaries in which he listed payments to the 115 other alleged recipients. The diaries have been seized by CBI.

BJP's Sharma said Mr. Rao was forcing the CBI to go slow in investigating his own role in the scandal. "He is trying to push the scandal under the carpet now that his name has been dragged into it," Mr. Sharma said.

Mr. Rao's Congress (I) Party reacted angrily to the BJP statement.

"They (BJP) have become desperate," Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil said. "They are completely discredited and have lost their self-proclaimed image of a pure party... That is why this venom."

The BJP is the second largest grouping in parliament, and also governs three Indian states and the city of New Delhi.

Russia Communists unite ahead of presidential poll

MOSCOW (R) — A hardline Communist splinter group has promised to back the expected candidacy of Russia's mainstream Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov in his bid for the presidency, ITAR-TASS news agency said.

The agency said a gathering of 20, mostly radical Communist groups and parties, decided late Sunday to back the single candidate to be nominated this Thursday at a Moscow conference of Mr. Zyuganov's Communist Party.

The name of the candidate is still officially under wraps but political commentators say there is little doubt that party leader Zyuganov, a former technical college teacher who led the Communists to a big win in the December parliamentary election, will be named.

Out of the 20 parties taking part in Sunday's meeting, the most important was the Working Russia Party, a hardline splinter group led by Viktor Anpilov which did surprisingly well in the December poll.

Mr. Anpilov's party, which pursues a classic Marxist-Leninist ideological line and wants the restoration of Soviet power, did not clear the five per cent barrier needed to form a separate faction in parliament.

But it won more than four per cent of the overall vote on party lists, outperforming a key reformist party led by former acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar.

Mr. Zyuganov's party won over 22 per cent of the vote and is now the biggest faction in parliament, controlling more than one third of the places in the State Duma lower house.

Some of the orthodox Communist groups have accused Mr. Zyuganov of shifting to social democracy and abandoning ideology.

But their decision to back him seems aimed at rallying all Communist forces to beat President Boris Yeltsin who is expected to announce his decision to run for re-election also this Thursday in his home city of Yekaterinburg.

Mr. Yeltsin himself, who is trailing Mr. Zyuganov in the latest opinion polls, also won support Sunday — but it was of the unwelcome kind.

Interfax News Agency said that after much haggling, radical nationalist groups in the second city of St. Petersburg decided to back Mr. Yeltsin, rather than Mr. Zyuganov or any other prominent nationalist leader, because of his use of "tough military measures in Chechnya".

Their support was likely to make Mr. Yeltsin and his aides cringe.

The 65-year-old Kremlin leader has lost support from most of the liberals due to the army campaign in Chechnya and is now trying to find a peace formula that puts less emphasis on military force.

China to close herbal medicine markets

BEIJING (R) — China will suspend new permits for factories producing traditional Chinese herbal medicines and close many markets to curb what officials Monday said was chaos in the burgeoning market.

"There is a lot of fake medicine on the market," an official of the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine told Reuters. "Even banned narcotics are available." Adulteration of traditional herbal medicines, available without a doctor's prescription, had caused disabilities and deaths, the state-run China Daily quoted Health Ministry officials as saying. The growing popularity of traditional herbal medicine in recent years and higher spending power of Chinese as a result of economic reforms have triggered a boom in the industry. Demand for such expensive remedies as Ginseng has soared, creating a ready market for fakes. The problem has brought chaos to China's herbs markets. The People's Daily, mouthpiece of the ruling Communist Party, blamed much of the confusion on regional protectionism and lax punishment by local judicial officials.

'Curse of Uluru' haunts visitors

SYDNEY (R) — Tourists who pocketed pieces of Australia's most famous rock have begun to mail them back to the outback Uluru National Park, complaining the souvenirs brought a curse on their lives, the park's manager said Monday. Julian Barry, who is encouraging belief in the curse to end souvenir-hunting at the rock, said he had received "a few pilokages a month" for the last two years from people who felt their small lumps of rock brought nothing but bad luck. "It's normally either people who have had bad luck or they have heard they (the rocks) might be bad luck," Mr. Barry told Reuters by telephone from Uluru, formerly known as Ayers Rock, about 2,000 kilometres west of Sydney. "We have had a very large wheelbarrow-load of rocks returned in the last two years," he said. National Park officials and the rock's aboriginal owners refer to them as "conscience rocks", he added.

Mr. Barry gave Reuters a copy of a letter he described as typical of the dozens he had received complaining of a curse. In it, a New Zealand man writes that his son has suffered "so much bad luck" since taking the souvenir years earlier. The son's father-in-law died and the son broke his back in a motorcycle accident, lost two dogs to road accidents and suffered even more heart-breaking hardships, the author wrote. "Bankruptcy seems to be reasonably common as well," Mr. Barry said, adding the letters came from around the world.

Hippos send naked bathers fleeing

NAIROBI (AFP) — Three rogue hippos sent naked bathers fleeing for their lives at the weekend — but they returned with spears, the East African Standard reported Monday. The newspaper said the hippos, in a river near the western Kenyan town of Migori, evaded their pursuers, who were "thirsting for meat," by swimming upstream. Some of the bathers expressed fears that a witch-doctor convicted of keeping a killer crocodile in the river eight years ago might have used his charms to bring the hippos on a similar mission, the Standard said.

Manila: Chinese pirate ship is a naval-type craft

MANILA (R) — The Philippine military said Monday a suspected pirate ship seized in a gunbattle on the weekend was a naval-type craft manned by a Chinese crew and believed disguised to look like a civilian vessel.

But armed forces chief General Arturo Enrile said the military was convinced the Chinese government had no knowledge of the activities of Chinese pirates preying on cargo ships inside Philippine waters.

The Philippine Navy said it captured the ship and its 20 member crew Saturday after it had tried to ram one of the boats near the former U.S. naval base in Subic Bay, which Manila has turned into a free port.

Asked if the 120-foot vessel belonged to the same group of suspected Chinese pirates who clashed with the navy in the same area on Jan. 22, Gen. Enrile told reporters: "We are not sure, but considering that they are using the same type of ship...coastal patrol interdiction craft, we are checking."

"It is possible they had disguised it so it would look like something else," said a navy official who asked not to be identified.

Gen. Enrile said the military had not found evidence to suggest the crew manning the heavily-rusted ship were off-duty Chinese navy personnel. "These are just reports...But nothing yet. We have to check this."

There was no immediate comment from the Chinese embassy.

Gen. Enrile urged talks with China to curb future intrusions by Chinese ships into Philippine waters.

"We should be able to somehow inform China that things of this nature are happening and that some kind of dialogue should be conducted, not necessarily filing a diplomatic complaint," he said.

Foreign Secretary Domingo Stazon said he had proposed talks with China on a joint patrol to stop piracy in the South China Sea and the matter could be taken up during regular consultations, in March in Manila.

The Chinese had said they would study the proposal, he said.

Mr. Stazon said the Philippines would lodge a protest with China over the weekend incident only if the navy proved Chinese government personnel were involved in the intrusion.

"If they are indeed Chinese PLA (People's Liberation Army), then we'll have to protest," he said. "As we have our own scallywags, they also have theirs."

Diplomatic sources said about 12 suspected Chinese ships had intruded into waters around Subic Bay since August, many of them believed to be preying on cargo vessels leaving the port.

Navy chief Vice Admiral Pio Carranza said he suspected the latest ship was involved not only in piracy but in smuggling human cargo into the Philippines.

Police in recent years have reported sightings of foreign ships allegedly unloading Chinese nationals on the shores of the main island of Luzon.

The navy reported an exchange of gunfire before the boat was seized. Gen. Enrile said no firearms were found on the vessel because they were apparently among the items the crew jettisoned before they were captured.

The ship's crew is being held for questioning in naval headquarters in Manila.



A giant boulder on a collapsed tunnel is dynamited Monday as part of rescue works for 20 people who are trapped inside the Toyohama Tunnel in Furubira on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. Rescue workers again failed to blast the giant boulder off from the tunnel (Reuters photo)

New bid to unblock Japan tunnel fails

TOKYO (R) — Rescue workers Monday again failed to blast a giant boulder from a collapsed Japanese road tunnel where 20 people have been trapped in an icy tomb for more than two days.

The second attempt in two days to use dynamite to dislodge the mammoth rock slab from the tunnel's shattered roof barely moved the giant boulder which weighs about 50,000 tonnes.

The rock slab crashed through the tunnel roof Saturday morning trapping 19 people in a bus and a lone motorist in a car.

On Sunday, rescue workers used 220 kilograms of dynamite in their first unsuccessful attempt to move the boulder so they could get to the victims from the roof.

The same amount of explosives was used in the latest attempt but with the same result.

The explosion merely clipped off the bottom edge of the 60 metre high and 40 metre wide slab and it just slipped further down from its upright position on top of the crushed tunnel.

Relatives gave permission for the two blasting operations in a desperate attempt to find out if their loved ones were still alive.

The tragedy happened when the giant tear-shaped rock slab slid off the side of a

mountain overlooking the tunnel and separated into its roof, opening a breach through which poured dozens of tonnes of debris at about 8 a.m. Saturday 12300 GMT Friday.

Workers, who can see the crushed front and back of the bus, have detected no sign of movements or sounds since rescue work started.

When the rock slab fell, a 40-metre stretch of the ceiling crashed down from just inside one of the entrances of the 1,086 metre long Toyohama Tunnel about 50 kilometres northwest of Hokkaido's capital city of Sapporo.

The rupture started before the tunnel burrows into the mountain through which it passes on a highway running along the Sea of Japan coast between the towns of Yoichi and Furubira.

Geology experts said landslides were a constant hazard on Hokkaido, an island regularly shaken by earthquakes and blanketed by snow for up to six months of the year.

They said earth tremors first opened small cracks in rocks which were widened by ice forming in them from the constant snow leading to regular massive rock falls.

Americans want political system pulled up from its roots — poll

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Americans are so disgusted with their political system that nearly half agree it is like poison ivy and should be pulled "up from its roots," a new poll reveals.

The survey, conducted between Jan. 29 and Feb. 4 by Brown University in the northeastern state of Rhode Island, found that only 14 per cent of respondents believe public officials will do what is right most of the time.

In 1957, 75 per cent thought politicians would do the right thing most of the time. But respondents were evenly split when asked if a third political party, to compete with the current Democrat and Republican hegemony, would improve matters. Forty per cent said it would, while 45 per cent said it would not.

"It's time we cleaned house," said Audrey Hendrick of California, who participated in follow-up questions by the pollsters. "There's too much of what they call lobbying and I call corruption — corporate cor-

ruption."

Brown political scientist Durrell West, who conducted the survey, said he was "stunned" by the results because Americans tend to be centrist and moderate.

The "poison ivy" question, which Mr. West found the most troubling of the answers, asked respondents if they agreed that the current political system is like "poison ivy, and the only solution is to pull it up from its roots."

Nearly half agreed. Other findings in the poll of 927 adults: — Over 70 per cent said the federal government's decision-making process is either poor or just fair.

— Some 42 per cent said they did not care which party controlled Congress — taken by Republicans in 1994 for the first time in 40 years — while 71 per cent said they did care which party held the presidency.

— Two-thirds say democracy will either stay the same or worsen in coming years.

14 feared dead in swollen S. Africa river

JOHANNESBURG (R) — Fourteen South African adults and children are feared drowned after their truck was found in a swollen river, police said Monday.

Torrential rains, welcomed by farmers in drought-hit northern areas of South Africa, claimed at least another three lives at the weekend.

Police said their divers had joined the search for the driver and 13 passengers whose vehicle was swept off a low-lying bridge near Mount Frere in the Eastern Cape last Thursday.

"Police and local people have been searching for the bodies since they noticed the people had gone missing," Inspector Maphelo Ngamane told Reuters.

"On Friday people saw the van in which they had travelled washed up on the river bank...and because there were school uniforms and articles found in the van we suspect children are among those drowned."

Three people were killed over the weekend in torrential rains in South Africa's northern province, one of the last parts of

the country still affected by drought.

One woman died when her mud hut collapsed and a man and woman drowned after being washed away by rivers bursting their banks, police said, adding two other people were missing after apparently being swept away.

The parched Tzaneen area in the far north, close to South Africa's Kruger National Park, received 376 mm of rain Friday and Saturday, the heaviest falls for years in one of the last drought-affected parts of the country.

Water authorities said they expected perilously low reservoirs would now fill up with adequate reserves.

Water shortages further inland towards the south coast were banished by heavy rainfalls in December, at the start of one of wettest summers for years.

In the worst flooding, over 150 people died on Christmas Day when up to 8.5 metres of water smashed through black townships close to Pietermaritzburg, near the port of Durban.

Dudayev says Chechenya war could spread 'to rest of Europe'

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, interviewed in his rebel hideout, warned that the bloody conflict in the Russian republic could spread to the rest of Europe, the daily Sabah said Monday.

"Europe is merely watching the (Russian) attacks on us. Let them watch, we will spread this war into Europe," Mr. Dudayev told the Istanbul-based daily.

The paper said Mr. Dudayev, who defied Moscow during his three-year rule as Chechen president by unilaterally declaring Chechenya independent, was questioned in an exclusive interview recently in rebel headquarters in an unspecified location of Chechenya.

He vowed that "the Chechen war will first spread to the whole of the Caucasus, ... then to Turkey, and then to Europe, and eventually it will lead to the third world war."

"And in Chechenya, our war will continue for decades, until the last Chechen is killed," Mr. Dudayev said.

He accused the Moscow-backed Chechen government led by Doku Zavgayev of betraying the Chechen people, and said his rule had implemented Islamic Shariah Law in this Muslim republic with a population of 1.2 million.

Mr. Dudayev said Russian prisoners-of-war in rebel

show of support for the Chechen rebellion.

The three-day action ended peacefully on Jan. 19 as Turkish authorities persuaded the gunmen to surrender near Istanbul.

Mr. Dudayev said the hijackers had not acted upon his orders, but expressed gratitude to them for bringing the Chechenya question into the world's agenda. He also called on the other Muslim peoples in the Caucasus to revolt against Russian sovereignty.

Over 2.5 million people of north Caucasian origin, including some 50,000 ethnic Chechens, live in Turkey. Their ancestors fled to the country during the Onoman period in the 19th century to escape Russian occupation of their lands.

Despite Turkey's official position urging a peaceful settlement in Chechenya that preserves Russia's territorial integrity, a majority of Turks, mainly nationalists and religious circles, sympathise with the revolt of their fellow Muslims in Chechenya.

Moscow has accused Ankara of failing to stop the flow of arms and some volunteers from Turkey into Chechenya, a claim the Turkish government rejects.

Meanwhile Russian soldiers in the Chechen capital Grozny said Monday that they were blowing up the staircases inside the ruins of the former presidential

palace to prevent people entering the upper floors of the ruin.

"We are blowing up the stairs so that future demonstrators will not be able to hang Chechen flags from the top, or banners on the walls," a Russian guard said after a large explosion went off from the central building.

The multi-storey concrete building, where Mr. Dudayev had his offices for three years and rebels held out for weeks against Russian attacks in January 1994, is in ruins, but the stairs were still accessible.

The building, now symbolic of the anti-Russian uprising, was the centre of a week-long demonstration by thousands of people that ended early Sunday. During the protest, the Chechen pro-independence supporters hung portraits of Mr. Dudayev and rebel flags from the walls of the ex-presidency.

After violently dispersing the demonstration, one of the first things Russian security forces did was to remove the flags and banners.

Russian soldiers fought for three weeks to capture the building in January 1994 after two weeks of aerial bombing of the city. The Chechen defenders finally pulled out after a massive penetration bomb was dropped, slicing through all 11 floors before exploding in the bunker.

Taiwan takes steps to ease China tensions

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan announced Monday it was forming a top-level group to ease mounting tensions with China and help shore up flagging economic confidence.

The move coincided with a warning by Defence Minister Chiang Chung-Ling that China was massing troops for a large-scale military exercise near Taiwan.

"The president is extremely concerned over people's worries caused by cross-strait (Taiwan-China) relations," said Premier Lien Chan in a statement announcing the working-group which includes several cabinet members.

"Today's meeting hopes to stabilise the political and economic condition and strengthen people's confidence so that the historic presidential election can be smoothly completed," the statement added.

There was no prediction of when China would begin the military exercises but tensions have been rising ahead of Taiwan's first presidential elections scheduled for March 23.

President Lee Teng-Hui is the front-runner but his popularity has fallen as sabre-rattling by China has shaken business confidence.

The working group aims to ease tensions with China, strengthen security during the elections and adopt measures to restore economic confidence, the statement said.

Mr. Lien's statement added that the government should also help industries restructure, assist small and medium-sized firms obtain funds and land as well as speed up the government's public spending programme.

It did not give details of the economic measures, nor did it say how the government would ease tension with China.

Finance Minister Lin Chen-Kuo told reporters separately that the government might announce measures later Monday to boost the real estate market and revive share prices which fell 27 per cent in 1995.

The Taiwan weighted index climbed 1.90 per cent to 4,866.31 as news of the planned market-boosting measures emerged during the last hour of trade.

Defence Minister Chiang quoted intelligence reports as showing that China has airlifted troops from Beijing to bases in Fujian province opposite Taiwan.

"At this time, the Chinese Communists' military activities show that they are preparing for a large-scale military exercise involving the army, navy and air force," Mr. Chiang said.

A Hong Kong newspaper reported this month that some 400,000 troops would take part in a month-long exercise along the coast of Fujian province. Taiwan share prices tumbled on the report but have recovered somewhat since.

China has regarded Taiwan as a renegade province since 1949.

Military exercises are an intimidating reminder of Beijing's threat to attack Taiwan if it declares independence.

Taiwan's current economic problems have been partially caused by the hostile tone China adopted toward Taipei after President Lee visited the United States in June last year.

Beijing, which insists that Taipei is not entitled to foreign relations, looked on Mr. Lee's private trip to his alma mater Cornell University as a move toward independence.

Fears of attack stoked by successive war games China has staged since last July prompted many investors to sell the Taiwan dollar in favour of safer foreign currencies. That in turn caused a tightening in liquidity and compounded weakness in the real estate and stock markets.

Meanwhile Chinese Deputy Premier Zhu Rongji renewed Beijing's accusations that President Lee is pursuing a policy of Taiwanese independence in an interview with Monday's German daily Handelsblat.

"Lee Teng-Hui is the one who has kept going further along the path to breaking Taiwan away from the Chinese fatherland," Mr. Zhu, currently visiting Germany, was quoted as saying.

"While developing activities aimed at creating 'one China and one Taiwan' or 'two Chinas', he is unscrupulously pursuing the goal of Taiwanese independence under the cover of elastic diplomacy," Mr. Zhu added.

He denied that Chinese military manoeuvres in the Taiwan Straits were intended to influence a presidential vote on March 23 and said they were simply "regular manoeuvres".



Japan's own-developed J-1 rocket blasts off from a launcher at Tanegashima Space Centre in south-western Japan Monday, carrying an experimental plane HYFLEX for developing a Japanese version of the space shuttle (Reuters photo)

Japan loses plane in ocean after successful rocket launch

TOKYO (R) — Japan's space shuttle programme took one step forward and one back Monday when a rocket carrying an experimental plane was launched successfully but the plane was lost at sea on re-entry.

Space agency officials said all went well with the J1 rocket test carrying the hypersonic flight experiment (Hyflex) plane until the plane splashed into the ocean on schedule 20 minutes later.

Floats which automatically deploy to support the one-tonne plane until it can be recovered failed to work and the craft sank.

When retrieval crews arrived, the floats were bobbing in the ocean but the 4.4 metre-long (14 feet) plane had broken free of a nylon rope attaching it to

the tubes and sunk.

Crucial data on the maximum temperature on re-entry to the Earth's atmosphere and any damage the craft suffered was lost, dampening elation at the successful rocket launch.

Hyflex was designed to collect data for use in developing Hope, a Japanese version of the U.S. space shuttle.

The eight-tonne, 16 metre-long (52 feet) hope, which Japan plans to use in unmanned explorations of the moon by the end of the century, would be launched from a more powerful Japanese rocket.

The total cost for development and production of the plane was 6.4 billion Yen (\$64 million).

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Early elections, but why?

NOW THAT the Israeli government has finally decided to hold early elections instead of waiting until the fall, the main concern is not whether Prime Minister Shimon Peres will win or not but rather what impact the poll would have on Syrian-Israeli peace talks. It is almost a foregone conclusion that the incumbent prime minister and his Labour Party will maintain much if not all of the current lead that they command over Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud Party. There is also a consensus in Israel that the sooner the Knesset elections are held the wider would be the gap in popularity between the two sides in favour of Peres and his group.

It may be surprising that Netanyahu, who is the Likud contender for the post of prime minister, has agreed to hold general elections earlier than was originally scheduled. Could he be banking on the possible erosion of the wave of popularity that Peres and his party currently enjoy? Or is he coveting surprises that he would spring up just before the Israelis go to the ballot boxes in May or June?

Surely the Likud people are not counting on the pact recently signed between their party and the extreme right-wing party Tzomet to run a joint slate of candidates. Joining hands with extremist groups cannot be exactly what the Likud needs to win given the backlash against the right generally caused by the campaign of hate propaganda that they had unleashed against the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his policies. Perhaps the Likud strategy might also rest on the conviction that Peres would commit a grave error along the way before the elections are held.

No wonder the Israeli prime minister is indirectly threatening to put the Israeli-Syrian peace talks on the backburner for fear of appearing too soft with Damascus and to confirm the long-held view that he is not a hard-nosed leader when it comes to dealing with the Arab side especially the Syrians. Peres' pledge to hold a plebiscite on any possible peace agreement that would entail a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights must be seen as an effort by him to assure his people that, contrary to the claims of the rightist factions, their security will never be compromised and that they, and they alone, would have the final word on the issue.

Against this backdrop, the impending Israeli elections will remain a big gamble for both sides even though the current odds appear to favour Peres and his party. To win, Peres must tread a fine line till the elections time and avoid rocking the boat too much lest he lose his circumstantial lead. We, on the Arab side, have a stake in the continuation of the peace process on all fronts. Any roll back from any full or intermediate accord painstakingly struck between the various Arab parties and Israel as a result of the forthcoming Israeli elections will surely deal a death blow to the entire peace process. We trust that the Israeli voters will realise the high stakes for regional peace when they cast their ballots one way or another in a few months. The last thing that the peoples of the area need is to pull the rug from under the peace regime that has already been attained or to sabotage the peace probabilities on the remaining fronts. In the final analysis the Israeli voters will be voting for peace or against peace in the Middle East and not only for one leader or another. Hopefully when the time comes, the Israelis will decide ultimately to do their share in the quest for peace, security and progress in this part of the world.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Commenting on Iraq's acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 986 on the sale of part of Iraqi oil to secure food and medicine for the Iraqi people, a writer for Al Ra'i daily said that the move was a wise one as it is aimed at ensuring the survival of the nation. Resolution 986 was considered as a humiliation to Iraq which had refused it in the past years, said Faded Al Fanek. But Baghdad had to accept the deal which stipulates that the oil sale should take place under U.N. supervision in order to secure badly needed medicines and food supplies, argued the writer. The sale of oil is beneficial not only for the Iraqis but also for the almost broke United Nations Organisation which is to receive part of the profit in order to finance its operations of disposing of Iraq's mass destruction weapons, and for Turkey which has incurred huge losses since Iraq's oil stopped flowing through pipelines running through its territory, he pointed out. The writer suggested that the U.N. should at least issue a statement declaring that Baghdad's acceptance of the U.N. resolution will by no means an infringement on Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A writer for Al Dustour criticised the Ministry of Labour for failing to take drastic measures to reduce the number of guest workers and ensure employment for the jobless Jordanians. The fact that the ministry is continuing to issue work permits to non-Jordanians means that the government is condoning the growth number of non-Jordanian workers, whose number is estimated now at 120,000, said Mohammad Daoud. What is needed immediately, he said, is a brave move on the part of the ministry, drastically reducing the presence of foreign workers by refraining from issuing work permits for most of the jobs and so ensuring that at least 60 per cent of the workers in any institution are Jordanians. It is illogical, he said, to see at least 30 per cent of Jordanian citizens living in poverty due to unemployment while non-Jordanians have priority in employment, with open approval from the concerned authorities.

The View from Fourth Circle

The Kabariti government and the road from protocol to history

By Rami G. Khouri

The new government of Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti and its astonishing mandate from His Majesty King Hussein for a "white revolution" may be a generational turning point in modern Middle Eastern history. Then again, it may prove to be only the usual brief excitement that accompanies all government changes in Jordan, a sort of local political musical chairs with much anticipation and movement, resulting in only an exchange of seats when the music stops. Several aspects of this new government strike me as significant, and most of them are related not to the government itself but rather to the broader political context in which it serves.

First, it is striking how little the issue of peace and normalisation with Israel have figured in the designation and formation of the new government. A reading of the designation letter and subsequent statements by the prime minister and the government indicates the predominance of three policy issues: domestic political life, pan-Arab relations, and the economy. Israel and our relations with it have become almost secondary. I suspect this is a reflection of the second issue:

A most important by-product of the peace-making process with Israel since late 1993, in my view, has been the shift in the monarchy's posture and leadership vis-à-vis domestic political life: from its traditional role as the consensus-building leader that was always above the fray of day-to-day domestic ideological battle, it found itself having to engage in the procedural equivalent of hand-to-hand combat with the forces in Jordan that oppose the peace treaty and normalisation with Israel. More specifically, King Hussein and Crown Prince Hassan personally had to carry the burden of explaining the benefits of peace to the Jordanian people, and then again personally had to take on the opposition through press conferences and televised meetings.

The monarchy almost single-handedly promoted the Jordanian-Israeli peace process, often without much public or visible domestic backstopping by the last two governments. Since 1993, the executive branch has been strikingly ineffective in either adequately explaining the mechanics and benefits of peace to the citizenry, or in engaging the Jordanian people in a consensus-building discussion on the matter (notice, for example, how little our public has learned about NAFTA). In personally selling the peace accord at home, King Hussein and the Royal family broke new ground for a monarchy whose success has always largely reflected its role as the conciliator, mediator and consensus-generating leader that remained above the heat of domestic battle. The new government's appointment reverses the unusual domestic political configuration of 1994-1995, and restores the monarchy to its traditional role as the source of broad political principles and leadership that are translated into fact by the actions of the executive branch and others in society.

This leads me to the third notable aspect of the new government, which is the king's call for a "pure, white revolution" and a "total and comprehensive overhaul of the state apparatus and its upper echelons". The enthusiasm that this call has generated in society has camouflaged the extraordinary nature of the process we witness: revolution from the crown down.

While in global historical terms it seems incongruous that a monarchy should foster revolutionary change, even of the pure, white variety, in Jordanian terms this is etched into the historical record. In fact, I would suggest, we witness today phase two of the process of domestic change and liberalisation that King Hussein launched in 1989, when parliamentary elections were resumed and democratisation was relaunched from the top down. The dynamism reflected in the Kabariti government is only a more lustrous variety of the same sort of political modernisation that we witnessed under the first government of then Sheriff Zeid Bin Shaker.

However, the process of domestic political evolution intermittently stalled and sputtered under some recent governments. We need to ponder why this happened. I suspect it principally reflected the fact that the monarchy's preoccupation with peace-making left domestic political modernisation in the hands of people whose democratic instincts were perhaps more a response to post-1989 Royal leadership than a reflection of life-long democratic fires that burned in their own executive bellies.

The Kabariti government, on the other hand, may represent in some of its key personalities a genuine generational change. The strong, democratic symbolism most notably

of the appointed ministers of interior, information, administrative development, agriculture and justice reflects Mr Kabariti's pledge to work for "open institutional dialogue", and to promote a new spirit of transparent interaction among the branches of government and between the government and the people. The King's modernist charge and Mr Kabariti's democratic spirit are impressive, explicit and timely; what remains to be seen is whether the executive branch and its domestic ideological allies have sufficient political will, cultural fortitude, and staying power to withstand the inevitable counter-revolution that will be attempted by elements of the old guard who are neither comfortable with nor happy about the tendency towards democratic liberalisation.

The transformation of 1989 was achieved without much resistance because it was more a change in form than content; it generated new political institutions and vocabularies, but the ideological tone and cultural modes of decision making were not radically changed in the period 1989-1995. With more democratisation, peculiarly, we suffered more divisiveness at home. This is why, for example, the issue of normalisation with Israel reared its head in recent years, because the opposition grasped it as the sole legitimate representation of discontent with the direction of domestic political change. Most Jordanians accepted peace with Israel, but most of them also hesitated about normalisation with Israel; domestic opposition to normalisation is not a foreign policy matter — it was and is primarily an expression of domestic discontent, a sign that ordinary and politically active Jordanians are unhappy with what they see as a regression in domestic political freedoms in recent years. Jordanians generally are not very worried about the content of their national policies, however, because they trust the king and his leadership; they are worried about the form and manner of domestic governance, because they are uncomfortable with the wielding of executive branch power in a manner that sometimes appears to them to be insensitive and heavy-handed.

'The new government's appointment reverses the unusual domestic political configuration of 1994-1995, and restores the monarchy to its traditional role as the source of broad political principles and leadership that are translated into fact by the actions of the executive branch and others in society.'

The monarchy and Mr Kabariti understood this, and have set about to change the style of governance, perhaps more than its substance — for the cardinal stylistic rule of governance in a culturally patriarchal society like ours is to treat others with respect and mutual trust, rather than with authoritarianism or arrogance. Jordanian national policy has generally served the country well, and does not need much changing. (In any case, there is little room for manoeuvre in Jordanian policies these days; our economic policy is firmly fixed into the path of adjustment agreed upon with the IMF and the World Bank, and our political policies have been determined by environmental, geographic, demographic, and geo-strategic factors that have not changed since the transition from the Iron Age Ammonite Kingdom to the Nabataean Kingdom of the Classical Period, some 2,300 years ago.)

The fourth aspect of the government change that I find fascinating is the repeated emphasis on corruption and nepotism. This was mentioned in the King's letter of appointment, and has been taken up with near Olympian vigour by the new government. This, too, is not new: corruption husting was a prime but unsuccessful mission of the parliament elected in 1989, and was revitalised in ministerial clothing by the second Sheriff Zeid Bin Shaker government. Resurfacing again, it makes one wonder: does the frequent talk about corruption reflect a determined will to locate and deal with the problem, or is it primarily a modern, sophisticated political form of acknowledging the concerns, and therefore the dignity and humanity, of ordinary people? We shall soon find out.

The fifth aspect of the new government that I find com-

elling relates more to the past than to the future. If there is such a clamour in the realm for more youth, competence, openness, participation, democracy, transparency and other joyous instruments of modernist governance, what does this tell us about our recent past? King Hussein prudently balanced his call for a white revolution with an admonition not to denigrate the accomplishments of past governments, "who bore their responsibilities and gave of their best." It seems to me that one of the challenges we still face as a citizenry and a polity today is to find that balance that defines stable, responsible yet accountable and effective governance: the middle ground between learning from the mistakes of the past, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, acknowledging public servants' many achievements and prodding them on to better things in the future. The last several cabinets generated strong criticisms and also achieved commendable deeds. Were the last government's handling of the press and its attitude towards domestic dissent and the professional associations effective, counter-productive or neither of the above? How in contemporary Jordan is such constructive, even affectionate, accountability administered? Both sides of the record of past officialdom need to be assessed and appreciated, if public servants are to make the exciting transition from protocol to history, and from the custodianship to the progress of human civilisation on our patch of Earth. The revolutionary imperative and its enthusiastic affirmation by the citizenry suggests the need for credible accountability systems that reflect King Hussein's call for balanced appreciation of the deeds of former public servants. For without responsible accountability and fair, compassionate assessment, there is no learning; and without learning there is nothing much beyond the ectoplasmic compulsion to survive.

The sixth and last aspect of the Kabariti government that I find important relates to its role within the wider society. We run the risk now of remaining only as disinterested bystanders and spectators — of watching this new drama of hope and expectation play itself out with only a few actors, on a stage far removed from our daily lives. This would be a sad waste. The fact is, neither King Hussein nor Mr Kabariti single-handedly can translate hope into fact without a widespread and activist response from society at large. The challenge of 1996, unlike the transition of 1989, is to provoke the citizenry and society as a whole into a participatory mode that goes well beyond voting in intermittent elections. A white revolution can only be meaningfully achieved by a wholesale popular response at all levels of society, by individuals and institutions that wake up every morning and ask themselves what they can do today to make Jordan more participatory, productive, accountable, responsive, equitable, merciful and fun — in short, what each of us can do to make Jordan the best possible country it can be.

The Kabariti government is the first major sign of the restitution of the traditional balance within the Jordanian domestic political system, with enlightened monarchical leadership and humble executive stewardship promoting decency, civility and progress for the people of Jordan. The new government, therefore, is actually about the ways of the past as much as it is about the ways of the future. It reconstitutes the traditional parameters of consensus-based governance in Jordan; it shares the modern fruits of incumbency widely with a parliament-based ministerial mass market; it refocuses domestic attention on issues of direct material and emotional concern to the average citizen; it reestablishes the bases of civility, trust, moderation, patience and compromise as the hallmarks of Jordanian decision-making; and it injects the whole complex with a generational stimulant that is fresh, credible, impressive and wildly unpredictable. On the eve of the third millennium, this is, all in all, a most appropriate, invigorating and very Jordanian happening. If it achieves its royally mandated revolutionary goals of building a more modern, participatory and accountable domestic governance system on the proven strengths of our traditional ways, it may come very close to matching the historic importance of the Iron Age-Classical transition in nationhood that we experienced nearly two and a half millennia ago. In that sense, the Kabariti government may be the most significant bridge between the past and the future since the too brief days of the government of the late Sheriff Abdul Hamid Sharaf.

Canada — the road to Belfast

By Gwynne Dyer

"Canada is divisible because Canada is not a real country. There are two people, two nations and two territories — and this one is ours."

— Lucien Bouchard, the new premier of Quebec.

"To those who will say that the majority of a people has the right to secede, others will reply that nothing grants one the right to reserve for oneself the title of people or nation; that if Canada is divisible, so is Quebec; that if a Canadian minority has the right to withdraw from Canada, then a Quebec minority has the right to withdraw from a secession which it does not accept."

— Stephane Dion, newly appointed federal Inter-Governmental Affairs Minister, Ottawa

The end game has begun in Canada, and there may be hell to pay before it is over. According to a poll early this month, 74 per cent of Quebecers now believe that the

province will eventually become an independent state. Not one in ten of them has the slightest idea about the dire circumstances that are increasingly likely to attend that independence.

The three-month lull after Quebecers came within 53,498 votes of choosing independence on the night of Oct. 30 is over. Lucien Bouchard has formally replaced the man whom he undermined and then shoved aside, Jacques Parizeau, as the premier of Quebec. He promises no new referendum this year — but the odds on a replay next year are at least even.

Canada's federal government is also preparing for the final showdown. In a reshuffle that amounted to a whole new government, Prime Minister Jean Chretien brought in several new French-Canadian stars to lead the battle for Quebec. And one of the new members, Stephane Dion, finally put the cards on the table.

Right through the 1995 referendum campaign, the federal government refused to say

what it would do if a majority of Quebec's population voted "yes" to independence. The federalists appeared to be cruising to an easy win until only a couple of weeks before the vote. Challenging Quebec's borders would have stirred emotions unnecessarily.

But with a test year to run before the next referendum, Ottawa clearly feels that there is now some potential benefit in forcing French-speaking Quebecers to face up to the harsh consequences of a decision to break up Canada: that it would also involve the dismantling of Quebec's present borders.

That is bound to provoke cries of outrage from headline nationalists in Quebec, but Ottawa calculates that it could also have a powerful deterrent effect on the "soft" nationalists who are the crucial "swing vote" in any independence referendum. Moreover, the stakes are going up: Quebec stands to lose more territory after a 1997 referendum than it would have in 1995.

Things would have moved

very fast after even the narrowest "yes" victory in Quebec last October. In the weeks before the vote, the separatist Parti Quebecois was making approaches to French-speaking officers in the Canadian armed forces, seeking their allegiance to an independent Quebec republic, and lobbying foreign embassies in Ottawa for instant recognition.

The separatists were realistic enough to understand that the panic flows of money and population triggered by a "yes" vote would have made a unilateral declaration of independence vital within weeks, not the year they publicly promised.

The Cree and Inuit native peoples who form the overwhelming majority of the population in the northern two-thirds of Quebec's territory were equally realistic. Their almost unanimous opposition to being forcibly separated from Canada would count for nothing if they were not able to enforce it on the ground — so the barricades would have been built across all the roads

and airstrips in the north within days of the vote.

The federal government, though not expecting armed conflict, was also taking measures that it did not discuss before the children. On the night of the referendum, for example, all the CF-18 fighters at the Baginville air base in Quebec were fitted with drop-tanks, so that they had the range to fly out if things went wrong. Ottawa was not going to give Quebec the nucleus of an air force.

But in the end, a "yes" vote last October would not have led to fighting. Quebec would have lost the north, though the legal hanging would have gone on for years. But its other boundaries would have remained intact, and those among the million-strong English-speaking and immigrant minorities in Quebec who could not bear to live in a state founded on French-Canadian ethnic solidarity would have left peacefully.

Not now. Within weeks of the vote, groups living in the parts of Quebec with a large proportion of non-Francophones — basically the west end of Montreal and parts of

the Ottawa Valley, conveniently adjacent to the Ontario border — were arguing that parts of Quebec which vote "no" have the right to break away if the next referendum yields an overall "yes". Now the federal government is effectively underwriting that option.

It might as well. Given a year to prepare for a "yes" in the next referendum, Quebec's minorities are bound to be considering the possibility of partitioning not just Canada, but also Quebec. Well-meaning people urge everybody to shut up about the divisibility of Quebec, because that road leads to civil war, but it's pointless: you can't stop people from thinking.

Canadians, and especially francophone Quebecers, cling to the belief that it can't happen here. It can, and it may. Montreal as Sarajevo, with artillery firing on residential neighbourhoods? Very unlikely. But Montreal as Belfast? Easy.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist and historian whose columns appear in 30 countries. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

Brunei's cars the killer in affluent society

By Paul Majendie
BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Brunei

Brunei was once a hotbed of pirates but now the police only tackle about two murders a year and most of them are easily solved crimes of passion.

In this oil-rich sultanate, the big problem is traffic, the big killer is the car.

Brunei may be one of the world's smallest countries but the discovery of oil has put it up there with Kuwait amongst the wealthiest.

Every household in this rainforest kingdom about twice the size of Luxembourg now boasts at least one car, if not two.

The police statistics tell the story all too graphically. About 65 people are killed on the roads every year compared to a murder total that rarely averages more than two.

"Everybody is talking about accidents. People are careless. It is the number one killer in Brunei," a senior police officer said.

"The murder statistics are not alarming. The last case we had was a Filipino maid found guilty of murdering a baby but ruled to be insane. Most of the killings are crimes of passion and heated discussions," he added.

The full title of the country that has a per capita GDP income of \$23,433 is Brunei Darussalam which means "shades of peace."

That is no idle boast in a tight-knit Islamic community where the rare murders make headline news, heroin addiction is not a problem and Chinese secret societies have not taken hold.

In a land where the sale of alcohol is banned, police are kept busy tracking down drug smugglers from Malaysia and closing down the illegal discos and bars that spring up.

"People say that forbidden fruit always tastes sweeter," the police officer said of their continuing crackdown.

Visitors to the kingdom run by the one of the world's longest-serving royal families are left in no doubt about the customs of Brunei, which gained its independence in 1984 after nearly a century of British rule.

Tickets for Royal Brunei Airlines print a stark warning that drug trafficking is punishable by death and the planes themselves are "dry" — the stewardesses offer no alcohol on flights into the kingdom on the north-west corner of Borneo.

"You certainly arrive in better condition than you do on most flights," the pilot boasted to international travellers unable to use alcohol as an excuse for their jet lag.

Affluence abounds in Brunei which the Bolkiahs have run for 500 years. The present near absolute ruler is Sultan Sir Hassanal Bolkiah who is reputed to be the world's richest man.

At Jerudong Park stand three superb pitches that are eloquent testament to the polo-playing potentate's passion for the sport. Beside them lies a floodlit 18-hole championship golf course.

Over the road is a giant amusement park for the 276,000 people of Brunei where all the rides from the bumper cars to the awesome red rollercoaster are free.

Brunei, whose swish-buckling sultans once held sway over a pirate kingdom that stretched to the Philippines, is a "womb to tomb" welfare state.

People pay no income or sales taxes. Education and health care are free. Low-interest loans are offered for cars, television sets and houses. Petrol prices are subsidised.

And yet amid all this conspicuous consumption, 30,000 people — most of the residents of the capital Bandar Seri Begawan — choose to live in Kampong Ayer, a floating village in the mouth of the Brunei River.

Wooden houses perch precariously on stilts above the murky waters. They are joined by rickety walkways. Lines of washing frame the verandah windows that are enlivened by pots of flowers.

Schools, clinics, mosques and shops supply their every need in what explorer Magellan's 16th century historian Antonio Pigafetta once called "the Venice of the east."

Eighteen-year-old Asli, born and bred in Kampong Ayer, now plies his trade with the family water taxi, a multi-coloured longboat that hurtles at high speed across to the sprawling city centre of Bandar Seri Begawan.

Asli, who avoided a watery grave by learning to swim at an early age as he played along those perilous walkways, is philosophical and content with his lot: "I like to live here. This is a good life."

People from our village are always taking home spent shells from the old military base to sell the metal," the 18-year-old told Reuters, speaking of the air training field where the Soviet Air Force practised bombing missions during the cold war.

"I thought it was harmless so I brought it home. When I tried to open it, it blew up in my face," he recalled with a shudder.

Live shells like the one that cost Mr Bilkis his left eye and both legs are part of the legacy that the Soviet military bequeathed to the Baltic state of Lithuania after it regained independence in 1991.

Located on the western edge of the Soviet empire and sharing a border with Poland, Lithuania had close to 60,000 Soviet troops at more than 400 sites stationed on its territory.

The troops quit Lithuania in 1993 and a Danish report presented in the middle of 1995 estimated that the small country faces a bill of more than \$1 billion to clean up the environmental damage left at the bases.

The report said that oil and chemical spills have made the topsoil at most of the bases useless for agriculture.

"The Soviet military left behind a terrible mess," said Pranas Mieruskas, a biologist and director of the Lithuanian Nature Fund.



Teenagers in Bandar Seri Begawan disembark from the Ranger ride at the Jerudong Park which provides totally free amusement rides. Brunei is a 'womb to tomb' welfare state where people pay no income or sales taxes and where education and health care are free (Reuters photo)

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"The Soviet military left behind a terrible mess," said Pranas Mieruskas, a biologist and director of the Lithuanian Nature Fund.

The new format leaves one channel primarily in English.

Afrikaans will fight for space on the other two. Depending who's counting, Afrikaans language programming will account for just one to four per cent of airtime.

"We're going to be serving the public," said Molefe Mokgatle, head of one of the new stations. "It's no more, 'this station is white, this one is black,' that's all gone."

Afrikaans advocates don't see it that way. They say more South Africans understand Afrikaans than English, yet English — a language that helped colonise half of Africa — is coming out the big winner.

The Freedom Front, a small party endorsing the idea of a mini Afrikaner state, says deep emotions raised by the language dispute has increased its support beyond expectations.

Mr. Mandela, whose strategy for ending apartheid centred on the need to defuse Afrikaner fears about black rule, appeared to sense that moves against Afrikaans were going too far this week when he rejected a parliamentary recommendation to make English the only language of command in the army, an Afrikaner stronghold.

"From President Mandela there's goodwill, there's no question about it," said freedom front spokesman Pieter Mulder. "But at the ground level, Afrikaners feel threatened. We are African, committed to Africa, but they have to make space for us."

Language battles loom in South Africa as TV switches tongues

By Patrick McDowell
The Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — Every Afrikaner knows how the English tried to impose their culture when they ruled South Africa, forcing children who spoke Afrikaans at school to wear signs saying: "I am a donkey."

Anyone living in the black township of Soweto knows the Hector Peterson memorial honoring the first martyr in the 1976 student uprising over the Afrikaner-led regime's bid to make Afrikaans the only language at school.

Language is power, and turbulence over tongues fills South Africa's history. A new skirmish was set to start Sunday night, when the South African Broadcasting Corp. (SABC) was scheduled to deeply cut Afrikaans programming on television in favour of African languages.

Angry by this perceived assault by South Africa's first black-led government on their culture, Afrikaners are taking the SABC to court, threatening to not pay annual TV taxes, and studying launching their own satellite television station.

The battle forms part of a rear-guard action by conservatives to defend their "taal," or tongue, in privileged bastions — the military, civil service, schools — where it held sway under apartheid.

The struggle reflects anxiety over the place of South Africa's so-called "white tribe" under President Nelson Mandela's reign — whether to stubbornly stress a unique identity, including demands for a separate mini-state, or to jump fully into the ethnic mix.

Afrikaans account for about 3.5 million of South Africa's 43 million people, but Afrikaans is also the first language of most of the 1.5 million South Africans of mixed-race descent. A further 10 million people speak the language or understand it. The activists suing the SABC account for a small minority of Afrikaners, though many more harbor fears of their language diminishing.

"Afrikaans is today not threatened, but it is under pressure," said Frits Kok, managing director of the Afrikaans Language and Culture Organisation, "but when you put any culture under pressure, it grows."

The Afrikaans language evolved from Dutch, the language of the Afrikaners' 17th-century forebears. Afrikaners view themselves as authentic Africans, rather than colonists, due to their long history on the continent. And they feel as aggrieved as any native people by the British conquest of their republics at the turn of the century.

The Afrikaner-led National Party capitalised on anti-British resentment and won power in 1948, replacing one form of injustice with another — apartheid, the system of white-minority rule that denied nearly all rights to South Africa's black majority.

Among them was language. English and Afrikaans were the only official tongues, though more than half the population understood neither. Naïve Afrikaans languages had status only in the so-called "homelands," or reservations where blacks were told to live.

Millions didn't, flocking to townships where their children received education in English and Afrikaans. The apartheid regime's plans to make Afrikaans the only language of instruction triggered days of rioting in the Soweto township outside Johannesburg, which shook the government to its roots.

"We were taught Afrikaans as a subject. It was always the most unpopular," recalls Tshepo Mashini, now urbanisation director of Johannesburg's Metropolitan Council. "What's happening with the television is a triumph in the sense that our culture wasn't assimilated by Afrikaans."

A schoolboy at the time, Mr. Mashini recalls his brother, Tsietse, leading the demonstrations and targeting the entire apartheid system by focusing on the potent issue of language. Tsietse fled to Guinea with a price on his head and died there in violent, mysterious circumstances in 1990.

Four years later, Mr. Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president. The post-apartheid constitution promises equal treatment for what are now 11 official languages — Afrikaans and English as before, plus the Sotho and Nguni language families that include widely spoken tongues like Zulu.

The SABC, a government mouthpiece under apartheid, is now obliged to broadcast in all the languages; rather than mostly in English and Afrikaans.

The damage is not confined to the bases. The water supply at the town of Taurage, 200 km west of Vilnius, has been contaminated by chemical seepage from a nearby military base.

Countless rivers and streams have been fouled by oil and chemical spills, environmentalists say.

But the environmental legacy left by the departing Soviet army is not simply one of poisoned soil and live shells.

Individually, the Soviet military protected habitat and wildlife around its bases and airfields.

"The Soviet military would occupy a large area, but only use a part of it," Mieruskas said. "The forests, bogs and wetlands surrounding many of the sites were untouched for decades."

"Red Army officers also used the sites as their private hunting grounds, but they were only interested in large game like red deer and wild boars, they left the small animals alone," he added.

A two-year study by the world wide fund for nature and the Lithuanian nature fund found that several former military bases enjoy very rich biodiversity and that large areas are covered by forest, wetlands and other vital habitats.

It also said that two species of birds thought to be extinct in Lithuania, the short-toed eagle and the red grouse, were discovered in former military zones.

The rare black stork, mountain hare and several species of cranes have also been found.

The Neringa Peninsula, a 50-km stretch of wilderness on Lithuania's coast, is another example of how the bases could protect nature as well as harm it.

For decades it was a restricted security zone but now it has a stunning variety of flora and fauna on its massive, shifting sand dunes as well as being home to sizeable populations of moose and wild boar.

"Nine of the former military sites will be transformed into nature reserves and parks," said Ruta Baskyte, the director of land management at the Environmental Protection Ministry.

Some of the old bases are also being transformed for commercial uses.

The local administration of the town of Siauliai in northern Lithuania has decided to build a new cargo airport at the nearby former Soviet airfield of Zoknaia.

But environmental problems have cropped up here as well. During reconstruction work last year, workers found small lumps of radioactive radium buried at the base.

Soviet bases leave mixed legacy in Lithuania

By Ed Stoddard
Reuters

RUDNINKAI, Lithuania — Danek Bilkis will never forget the day he went foraging for scrap metal at a disused Soviet base near his home village of Rudninkai in southern Lithuania.

"People from our village are always taking home spent shells from the old military base to sell the metal," the 18-year-old told Reuters, speaking of the air training field where the Soviet Air Force practised bombing missions during the cold war.

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King: Saudi visit very successful

(Continued from page 1)

Times. "There was total concurrence over all issues and here was agreement on future cooperation in a way that would not allow what happened in the past take place again."

The King did not meet with King Fahd, who is recuperating from a stroke in November that forced the postponement of an earlier planned visit by King Hussein.

"I did not have the honour of seeing him this time," the King said. "I believe he is in good health but he is convalescing from the condition that all of us were aware of some while ago. I understand he was doing very well. He requested the crown prince to send us his greetings."

The King was accompanied by a high level delegation that included members of the Royal family and representatives of the different political shades in the Kingdom. The delegation included Their Royal Highnesses Princes Abdullah, Faisal and Hamzah as well as Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid, the chief chamberlain and other Royal family members.

Also accompanying the King was Mr. Kabariti, speakers of the Senate and Lower House of Parliament Ahmad Lawzi and Sa'd Hayel Sour, Chief of the Royal Court Awn Khasawneh, King Hussein's advisor on religious affairs and other senior officials, parliamentarians and journalists.

One of the delegates who was accompanying the King described the visit as a "moving experience."

"We had a very warm welcome... by the officials and the people in the street."

The King will visit Egypt on Thursday for talks with President Hosni Mubarak.

third on their list while opinion leaders placed them seventh (last).

On top of both lists, however, both sampled peoples thought poverty, unemployment and the economy should be accorded priority.

Also on both lists were administrative reform and fight against corruption.

Relations with other countries were listed as merely "foreign relations" on the agenda of ordinary people, but opinion leaders demanded improved relations with the Gulf states, Iraq and Syria.

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Kabariti

(Continued from page 1)

however, fewer "opinion leaders" than ordinary people expected or believed that either the prime minister or his government will fail, though this was also translated into differences of small percentage points, which the margin of error in the poll, estimated at between 3.5 per cent, could account for. Yet 7.8 per cent and 3.4 per cent, among the ordinary Jordanians and the "opinion leaders" respectively, said "I don't know" in answer to the question on the government.

On a third question concerning the shape of the new government, about a third of those polled (32.2 per cent) and a fifth (21.7 per cent) of the "opinion leaders" thought that the make-up was about right. Those who said it was about "half right" were 37.2 per cent among ordinary people and 43.5 per cent among the "opinion leaders."

4.6 per cent from the national sample compared to a high 19 per cent of the opinion leaders thought the make-up of the Cabinet was "right to a small extent."

To 13 per cent of the opinion leaders and 4.6 per cent of ordinary Jordanians the make-up was not right.

However, 18.8 per cent of the latter category, compared to 2.4 per cent of the former, said they did not have an answer to the question of make up.

On top of both lists, however, both sampled peoples thought poverty, unemployment and the economy should be accorded priority.

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Arab food shortage worsens

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Arab food imports increased by nearly \$1 billion in 1995 and the farm gap is set to worsen due to a rapid population growth and worldwide protectionism, an official Arab report has said.

Imports by the 22-member Arab League of wheat, sugar, oil and meat were estimated to have increased by between \$793 million and \$1.15 billion in 1995, said the report by the Khartoum-based Arab Corporation for Agricultural Investment and Development (ACAID).

It said the increase and a projected growth in farm imports in the near future widened the deficits in Arab balances of payments, already under pressure by the slow growth in exports and a steady rise in imports.

"Given the steady growth in the population of the Arab countries and an improvement in eating habits due to better economic and social conditions, their need for food will increase day after day," said the report, published in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) newspaper Al Khaleej.

"The continued reliance on abroad to bridge the food gap will always be costly not only financially but economically, socially and politically because he who does not own his food does not own his security and future," it added.

ACAID, the Arab League's main farm group, said Arab farm imports far exceeded exports, creating a deficit of around \$11 billion a year.

It gave no other reasons for the large deficit but previous studies have blamed inadequate agricultural policies, lack of investment in the farming sector, and failure by member states to exploit their arable land.

According to the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), the arable area in the region is estimated at around 198 million hectares but less than one third is exploited. This is because of shortages in funds and equipment, political differences within the Arab League and unrest in some members.

One study showed the cumulative value of the Arab food imports has totalled around \$190 billion since 1980. This is in addition to payment of nearly \$46 billion on the import of farm equipment.

AMF projections showed the Arab wheat shortage would jump to \$19.2 million in 2000 from \$8.8 million in 1992, while that of cereal would rise to around 26.1 million tonnes from 19 million tonnes.

ACAID said the Arab food deficit would come under further pressure from growing protectionism and plans to remove subsidies on farm products by most countries following the latest GATT free trade agreement.

"Implementation of that agreement will make the Arab food import bill more costly and this will aggravate the food security problem," it said. Arab states need to map out a clear strategy to utilise the available resources and achieve food security.

Lebanese wine output, exports booming

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon's wine production, which has been on the upturn since the end of the civil war, reached five million litres in 1995 earning the country \$150 million, experts said.

They said wine production was in full expansion and that about 40 per cent of the overall wine produced in 1995 was exported to Europe, the Americas and Australia.

Official development aid seen stagnating — OECD

PARIS (AFP) — Developing nations must increasingly count on domestic resources and sound policies to attract private funds amid growing competition for scarcer official aid, a key OECD committee warned Monday.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) said Japan, the world's largest aid donor, accounting for one-fifth of total DAC aid, as well as France and several smaller countries continued to increase their official aid in 1994.

But major donors facing large budget deficits, including the United States, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, cut their official development assistance (ODA) significantly.

"It is hard to imagine that the volume of ODA will in-

crease dramatically in the near term," DAC chairman James Michel said in the annual DAC report.

DAC set the total 1994 net flow of resources to the developing world at \$184 billion, with \$164 billion coming from OECD countries.

It said private flows including direct investment, bank lending and equity purchases topped \$181 billion, accounting for 60 per cent of the total, with official aid at \$59.7 billion or one-third of the total.

Ten years ago, at the height of the Latin American debt crisis, ODA accounted for more than half and private flows for barely 34 per cent of net total flows.

Official aid from 23 donors in the 25-nation Organisation of Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) rose to \$59 billion in 1994 after a \$4.3 billion fall to \$56.5 billion in 1993, the report said.

But in real terms, taking inflation and exchange rate movements into account, the 1994 figure was unchanged from 1993 and lower than in 1992.

And as a share of their gross national product (GNP), aid from the 22 DAC members dropped from 0.51 per cent to a 22-year low of 0.30 per cent.

The ratio had remained at around 0.35 per cent, half the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent, for two decades up to 1992, DAC said.

Only for DAC countries — Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands — topped the 0.7 per cent target in

1994. Top donor Japan boosted its aid by \$2 billion to \$13.2 billion but its ODA to GNP ratio, at 0.29 per cent, remained below the DAC average.

The U.S., the top donor until 1992, cut its aid to \$9.9 billion from 10.1 billion in 1993, and its ratio fell to 0.15 per cent, half the average and the lowest of all DAC donors.

France, the third-ranking donor at \$8.5 billion, was the only Group of Seven country providing aid in excess of 0.5 per cent of its GNP.

Aid from non-OECD countries, including Arab oil producers, fell to \$1.4 billion in 1994, one-quarter of the 1990 level.

Sub-Saharan Africa received 37 per cent of world

ODA in 1993-94, and Asia about 30 per cent, with China and India accounting for respectively \$3.2 and \$2.3 billion. 14 per cent went to the Middle East and North Africa, and 11 per cent to Latin America.

The report said east European countries and the former Soviet republics received aid worth some \$7.5 billion, with Germany accounting for one-third. But this aid was not counted as ODA.

DAC chairman Michel said "heated budget debates, especially in the U.S., were grounds for serious concern about future levels of ODA resources." Although the United States now has "a significantly reduced budget deficit," continued budget consolidation meant U.S. "aid may be cut yet again."

the report said. Mr. Michel welcomed sharply increased private flows but stressed that they remained "highly concentrated" in a small number of advanced developing economies.

Even if poorer nations did more to help themselves and become less dependent on aid, "we cannot pretend that those efforts will eliminate the need for investment by the donors," he said.

The debt burden facing many developing countries continued to limit their access to private capital, and poor countries with stagnant economies were not attractive to investors.

Development aid would remain "vital... for the foreseeable future," Mr. Michel said.

IMF proposes new standards for economic data to help avoid crises

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Charged with keeping a keener eye on the world economy after Mexico's financial crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has proposed new guidelines aimed at providing improved and standardised economic data.

The fund said the proposals are particularly important because "comprehensive and financial data play a vital role" in an era of "globalised financial markets."

The 25-page document suggests a standardised method countries could use to provide economic data in a regular and timely manner,

saying this would help smooth market fluctuations.

Governments would publish at regular intervals a simple set of economic indicators the IMF defined as a "general standard."

In addition, countries participating in international financial markets or wanting to do so should provide information in accordance with what the fund called a "more demanding standard."

The draft document stresses that it would be up to the countries concerned to decide whether they wanted to sign up to provide the more complex data.

That set of figures is made up of about 15 information categories, each divided into several components. The indicators include gross domestic product, production, employment, income, prices, trade and public spending.

Domestic and foreign debt, debt servicing projections, private and public banking figures and interest rates are also in the list.

A detailed balance of payments for goods and services, gold reserves, current, three- and six-month exchange rates; nothing seems to be missing from the list.

Everyone of these indicators would have to be provided at regular intervals — every three months, monthly or even weekly in the case of gold and foreign currency reserves.

The IMF would publicly identify countries that have signed up to the more demanding standard and would provide information as to how and when to obtain the data. For this, the IMF will use an electronic bulletin board it will maintain at a World Wide Web site on the Internet.

Countries that sign up for the more demanding standard must undertake to respect four principles: The timely delivery of the indicators, free access to the data for the public and in particular financial market players, the integrity of the statistics and a description of the methodology used in compiling the data.

The draft document does not list the countries considered candidates for the detailed data — heavily indebted countries and those that borrow on financial markets.

But a list in the "World Economic Outlook" published by the IMF, shows that

23 countries qualify as "market borrowers" with more than two thirds of their total liabilities outstanding owed to commercial creditors.

The list includes Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Israel, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, Thailand, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The IMF's oversight body, the Interim Committee of the Board of Governors had requested in April 1995 that the fund develop the standards.

The document is being circulated, among others on the Internet, for discussion and comment in advance of a final version to be completed by the end of March.

IMF teams working on the proposals met with financial market players and analysts in 23 countries and consulted international organisations and authorities in another 42 countries.

Report: 37m Russians living in poverty

MOSCOW (AP) — Nearly 37 million Russians — about a quarter of the population — was living in poverty in 1995, according to a report released by the State Statistics Committee.

It said they were struggling to get by on less than the official minimum subsistence income, which was 327,000 roubles (\$65) a month in December.

The ITAR-TASS news agency said the report was prepared for the upper house of parliament, the Federation Council, which is debating a law on the official subsistence level.

Russians have seen their living standards plummet since the 1991 Soviet collapse because of rising prices, inflation, unemployment and the erosion of government social benefits.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved a \$1.05 billion loan for Russia, the last installment of a

\$6.3 billion line of credit the agency approved last year.

"The IMF's management has expressed its satisfaction with Russia's track record in 1995 of full implementation of the Economic stabilisation and reform programme," the international lending organisation said in a brief statement.

With the June presidential election nearing, President Boris Yeltsin has been riding his government of reformers and liberals in response to the success of communists and nationalists in December parliamentary elections.

Apparently hoping to appease angry voters, Mr. Yeltsin also has approved a series of costly new spending measures, including pension and benefit increases.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1996

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Be more sympathetic with those at home at this time and improve conditions there considerably. You should not be so critical of loved ones.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Finding the correct solution to perplexing matters is the key in the morning today and later this evening be very conscientious.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You may feel a lack so get busy at this time and find the right way to have greater income. Be more willing to work hard for you to be prosperous.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Stop feeling so sorry for yourself at this time since this only a habit you had better get out of for your own good or you could feel miserable.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Some secret affair has to be cleared up quickly today so that you need not feel so concerned. Think seriously and do it.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Being more objective is wise or you could get confused over a friend's emotional difficulties. Get to the heart of matters.

LINBA: (September 23 to October 22) Be very tactful in dealing with others today, especially the powerful, as you travel abroad. Handle credit matters wisely.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Stop worrying over what you can do little about today and study new enterprises which could be profitable for you.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Concentrate on separating business from other affairs at this time so that you can gain that feeling of security and success.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You have to be tactful with one who is sensitive today and later tonight if you want to reach an agreement with this person.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) It would be wise to forget business and other practical affairs at this time and later tonight rest up for a busy work ahead.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You may find today that a usually helpful friend may put a damper on the good time you had planned. Take it in your stride.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx

Al Mimadania Secondary School

Needed:
Qualified IGCSE teachers - all Subjects. Apply at Amman Baptist School

Phone: 677534. From Feb. 13 until March 15.

THE Daily Crossword by Janet R. Bender

ACROSS
1 Soft drink flavor
5 Singer McEntire
9 Like Santa's helpers
14 In the center of Arabian sultanate
15 Hall of Fame's Greasy
17 Mexican food
18 Containers
19 Levied an impost
20 Braves' third baseman
23 Chapeaux seller
24 Lulu
25 Numerical prefix
28 Cliqua
30 Unit of measure
32 Seize suddenly
35 Snack food
38 On a cruise
40 It's mostly nitrogen
41 Fencer's weapon
42 F-mixture style
47 Superlative suffix
48 Available apartment
49 Feeler
51 Chang's twin
52 Try
55 Oscar winner
59 Alvin, Simon and Theodore
61 To one side
64 Maka over
65 Membership fee
66 European river
67 Woody's son
68 Border lake
69 Crazy
70 Part of a hammer
71 Mailed

DOWN
1 Work behind the plate
2 City on the Missouri
3 Lawful

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Yesterday's puzzle solved

4 Takes as one's own
5 Hall of Fame's Clementa
6 Kuwait ruler
7 Stringed instrument
8 Hall of Fame's Tomel
9 Intestinal
10 Poetic pastures
11 Office machine
12 — de-France
13 Actor Beatty
21 Hasty look
22 Fictional captain
25 Rubbish
26 Captures
27 Small map
29 Gatz of jazz
31 Emasto
32 Molhar-ol-pearl
33 Pale
34 Existence
36 Halp
37 Two-wheeled carriage
39 Quick to learn
43 Trail
44 Gen. Robt. —
45 Salire
46 Actor Jack
50 Bluenosas
53 Discard
54 Al that placa
56 Accustom
57 Knitter's coil
58 Cash, a.g.
59 Camper's shelter
60 Unemployed
61 Do sums
62 Show sign
63 — Carson

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen

GLASBERGEN

"I think the cat wants a bite of whatever it is you're eating."

JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Miles Argillon

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

ULIGE
DYNAB
NUCKOL
VINNET

Print answer here: THE

Yesterday's Jumble: BELLE FUDGE WORTHY VIRILE
Answer: There is nothing longer than this — FOREVER

Peanuts

I TRIED BEING A SHEEP DOG ONCE..

I USED TO STARE AT THE SHEEP LIKE THIS, BUT IT DIDN'T WORK..

THEY THOUGHT I WAS JUST BEING RUDE!

Andy Capp

SEE YOU

OKAY, PET.. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I HATE TO SEE YOU GOING OFF TO WORK, DAY IN, DAY OUT

OH, DEAR, DEAR.. ON MY WAY HOME I'LL GET YOU SOME DARK GLASSES!

IS YOURS LIKE THIS IN THE MORNING?

Mutt'n'Jeff

ENCEE, THERE'S A BEAUTIFUL MOON OUT TONIGHT! COME HERE!

OH, JEFF!

I'M A VERY EMOTIONAL FELLER! COME CLOSE WHILE I HOLD YOU IN MY ARMS!

NOW THEN -- LET ME TELL YOU HOW WONDERFUL I AM!

Leeson says Barings deception was easy

LONDON (R) — Former Barings trader Nick Leeson, who brought down the venerable merchant bank a year ago with \$1.4 billion in bad trades, said in an autobiography published Monday that it had been easy to deceive his employers.

Because he had a reputation as a "superstar," the bank's directors were willing to let him do anything he wanted, Mr. Leeson wrote in his book "Rogue Trader."

Describing himself as "the trading superstar who moved the market this way and that," Mr. Leeson detailed how he lost the money over a period of time in operations in Singapore and fled the island state in shame and fear.

Barings, Britain's oldest merchant bank, collapsed last February after Mr. Leeson ran up huge losses through unauthorized derivatives trading.

The ex-trader, who confessed to his crimes, is serving a six-and-a-half year prison term in Singapore for his part in the affair. Barings has been bought by Dutch financial group ING.

In the autobiography, serialised Monday in the Daily Mail newspaper, Mr. Leeson detailed the events of Feb. 23, 1995, when he brought Barings down.

"The market had burst me. I was sitting over the teletext screens, looking at the football games for Saturday, trying to forget that I had lost hundreds of millions of pounds and had run out of hope," he wrote.

He did not know exactly how much he had lost. "I was too frightened to find out — the numbers scared me to death."

Mr. Leeson said he slipped off the trading floor, avoiding curious telephone calls and at least one inquiry from a London accountant trying to investigate a "hole in the balance sheet."

"The rest of the market had smelled what my employers back in London, Barings, were completely ignoring. That I was in so deep that there is no way out," he wrote. But he said he did not know his actions were going to bring Barings down.

He said the seeds of the collapse were sown as early as 1992, when he covered up for a colleague's "tiny" 20,000 pound (\$30,000) loss by bidding it in an error account be set up for such purposes.

He was never asked for the file on the account and it remained locked in his desk until after he fled Singapore. By then it had reached frightening proportions.

"It had grown out of control and I had misused it. I didn't even bother looking at it. It scared me to death."

Mr. Leeson described other deceptions he used to cover his tracks. "I had invented a 50 million pound (\$76 million) trade between Barings and another company to hide the size of a loss I had made on the market. Using scissors and paste, I had forged a fax saying Barings would be paid the money."

But he realised on Feb. 23 that his time was up. "I'd have to get out of here before

cause everything would be discovered."

Mr. Leeson said he telephoned his wife Lisa and asked her to flee Singapore with him.

"I've lost a lot of money and I need to leave," he told her. "I need to resign. I've broken the law. Christ, the Singaporeans are probably going to go crazy and put me in prison. I can't tell you how bad it is."

After spending a few days at a remote beach resort in Malaysia, Mr. Leeson decided to fly home to London. He was arrested on March 2 in Frankfurt, after arriving on a flight from Brunei.

AFP news agency adds the following details:

"If Tony Raiton (who came out to Singapore when Barings' suspicions were first aroused) had been able to read upside down he would have seen some figures which would have given him a heart

EU working women provide more than fair share

BRUSSELS (R) — Three out of five working women in Europe take home at least half of their family's income, a survey unveiled by the European women's lobby has said.

The poll for the Whirlpool Foundation, a philanthropic organisation, interviewed 6,781 women and men in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

It said that six out of 10 women choose to work for money, but 48 per cent would still work if money was not a problem.

"Assumptions that women work for just extra cash, or that having a family means giving up a career just don't hold for today's women in Europe," Whirlpool Foundation representative Francesca Renna told a conference in Brussels.

The study was designed to illustrate concerns that European social policies were outdated and ill-suited to the role of modern women.

The European women's lobby said it was concerned that the 15-nation European Union (EU) had backtracked on equal opportunities since the Beijing U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women last September.

The European Court in October said a lawsuit passed by the German city-state of Bremen had violated EU law by giving female candidates with the same qualifications as men preference where women were under-represented.

Shortly afterwards EU social affairs ministers cut in half an EU fund to promote equal opportunities.

LONDON EXCHANGE RATES

LONDON (R) — Following are the buying and selling rates for leading world currencies and gold against the dollar on the London foreign exchange and bullion markets Monday.

One U.S. dollar	1.3710/10	Canadian dollar	1.4722/32
	1.4722/32	Deutsche mark	1.6478/88
	1.6478/88	Dutch guilders	1.2020/30
	1.2020/30	Swiss francs	30.27/31
	30.27/31	Belgian francs	5.1595/45
	5.1595/45	French francs	1570.5/2.0
	1570.5/2.0	Italian lire	106.52/62
	106.52/62	Japanese yen	6.9510/10
	6.9510/10	Swedish crowns	6.4340/90
	6.4340/90	Norwegian crowns	5.6921/21
	5.6921/21	Singapore dollar	1.4132/42
	1.4132/42	Australian dollars	0.7542/47
	0.7542/47	Hong Kong dollars	7.7315/25

One sterling	\$1.5316/26
Gold (ounce)	\$404.00/404.50

JORDAN TIMES
TEL: 699634
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DAILY BUSINESS BEAT

A review of news from the Arabic press

False report prompts political parties to open fire on Central Bank

*** THREE POLITICAL parties have issued a statement criticising the Central Bank monetary policies and questioning their benefit for economic growth, investment attractiveness, employment creation and pricing stability. In their statement, the Progress and Justice Party, the Unionists Party and Al Jamaheer Party said they have reservations on the measures taken by the Central Bank to raise interest on credit facilities to businessmen by one per cent as such an increase would hit investment, raise prices and burden the public. (The statement referred to an article which appeared in an Arabic daily two weeks ago highlighting a story that the Central Bank has raised interest rates on loans by one per cent. The Jordan Times published a Central Bank denial of such an action the following day as interest rates in Jordan have been floated many years ago). The parties pointed out that interest rates have reached 14 per cent and, as such, "we can immediately feel the negative effect of this interest ceiling and the higher cost of borrowing for investment or trading. The negative effect would immediately reflect on prices of products and services which cannot bear more increases anymore especially with the weak purchasing power and the fall of real purchasing value. Noting that the Central Bank has raised interest on certificates of deposit and, consequently, siphoned JD 320 million of liquidity from the banks and the hands of the people," the parties said that such a large amount should have been left free for various investments.

"The direct result for accumulating certificates of deposit is freezing or reducing currency in circulation and, consequently the shrinking of commercial activity," the parties indicated pointing out that 104 companies, capitalised at JD 1.6 million, were dissolved in December 1995 when companies capitalised at a total of JD 9.6 million were set up, compared with December 1994 when companies capitalised at JD 21.3 million were established. The statement blasted the Central Bank for its measures to limit the liquidity by raising the interest rates and, as such, causing a drop in the volume of trade at the stock exchange and a slump in share prices that has been continuing since 1993. Trading at the Amman Financial Market has declined from JD 495 million in 1994 to JD 371 million in 1995.

"The aim of raising interest rates is to curb inflation and restrain higher cost of living and we think that Jordan has witnessed slight inflation because it is not a productive country compared to other advanced countries," the parties noted. "So, to fight inflation by raising interest rate on credit facilities and sucking the cash from the market is a futile and unproductive process at this time because the direct result would be reducing supplies of goods and lower investment initiatives and, at the end, higher prices." Noting that the cost of living index had risen from 100 points in 1992 to 113 points in 1995, the statement attributed that to supplies being less than the demand and to the Treasury's need for more revenue. Such a condition was the cause for raising the sales tax rate from seven per cent to 10 per cent and for increasing other fees such as postal charges, the statement added.

Seeing the monetary measures of the Central Bank as hindering the advancement and expansion drive of the country and the welfare of the citizens, the parties have demanded that under the present conditions the interest rate should not be raised beyond 14 per cent and credit facilities should not be restricted, especially to productive projects.

"The exaggerated measures of raising interest rates or restricting credit facilities are not used except in emergency cases of fear of extremely high inflation which is not the case in Jordan where the commercial activity is shrinking at present," the parties stressed. "The monetary policies have slowed the general economic growth which might not rise over six to 6.5 per cent in 1996 unless funds are made available at the lowest cost possible," the statement concluded (Al Ra'i).

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET				
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI				
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ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR MONDAY 12/02/1996				
COMPANY'S NAME	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE	PRV. CLOSING	CLOSING
TRADING	TRADING	TRADING	PRICE	PRICE
ARAB BANK P.C.	460	107460	234.000	224.000
ARAB BANK P.C.	10000	48000	4.500	4.500
ARAB BANK P.C.	95812	344918	3.550	2.600
NATIONAL EAST INVESTMENT BANK	1750	2025	1.170	1.170
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	1200	2917	2.430	2.430
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK/NEW	1018	1018	1.010	1.010
THE HOUSING BANK	1425	1234	0.860	0.860
JORDAN OIL BANK	1250	1285	1.030	1.030
JORDAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE BANK	2173	8321	3.890	3.890
THE JORDAN BANK FOR INVESTMENT	765	2688	3.520	3.400
ARAB BANK FOR INVESTMENT	13500	457	3.350	3.010
ARAB BANKING CORPORATION/JORDAN	580	1257	2.150	2.150
AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET	255750	370243	1.290	1.290
BANKS SECTOR	386949	909123	INDEX NUMBER: 186.20	CHANGE: -0.24%
JORDAN PRIMA INSURANCE	2100	5080	2.400	2.400
INSURANCE SECTOR	2100	5080	INDEX NUMBER: 129.32	CHANGE: 1.00%
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	5500	9604	1.770	1.730
AMMAN DISTRICT ELECTRICITY	1100	1529	1.400	1.390
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	1600	2544	1.590	1.590
REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT	250	240	.950	.960
JORDAN INTERNATIONAL TRADING CENTER	500	325	1.050	1.050
ARAB TRADING & COMMERCE MODELS	200	125	2.150	2.150
ARAB TRADING & COMMERCE MODELS	1500	5127	3.400	3.400
ARAB TRADING & COMMERCE MODELS	1000	1160	1.170	1.160
UNTYPTD CO. FOR ORGANIZING LAND TRAM.	4900	18201	2.240	2.220
SERVICES SECTOR	18600	36515	INDEX NUMBER: 125.69	CHANGE: -0.73%
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	4374	16000	3.670	3.650
THE ARAB POTASH	5635	22147	3.930	3.930
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINERY	4837	45165	9.330	9.360
THE INDUSTRIAL COMMERCIAL & AGRICULTURE	2500	8900	3.560	3.560
THE JORDAN HOTELS & RESORTS	700	5313	7.600	7.550
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	4050	17984	4.450	4.420
JORDAN DAIRY	1437	3478	2.450	2.420
THE JORDAN PAPER MANUFACTURING	87	190	2.200	2.200
THE JORDAN PAPER MANUFACTURING & INVESTMENT	300	3600	7.200	7.200
ARAB ALUMINUM INDUSTRY	3800	21538	5.600	5.620
INDUSTRIES & POLYMER	1080	882	.840	.840
ARAB PAPER MANUFACTURING & TRADING	9100	13013	1.430	1.430
NATIONAL STEEL INDUSTRY	700	1134	1.630	1.620
NATIONAL INDUSTRIES	1000	970	.990	.970
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	750	1053	1.420	1.400
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	1200	1931	1.620	1.600
KANUN INVESTMENT	900	1395	1.550	1.550
JORDAN MODERN INDUSTRIES	2750	8272	3.020	3.000
JORDAN THERMAL INDUSTRIES CO.	2000	5586	2.790	2.790
JORDAN RAY CANILE COMPANY	8800	17483	2.000	2.000
THE JORDAN RAY CANILE COMPANY	11070	22600	2.050	2.050
INTERNATIONAL TOBACCO & CIGARETTES	2667	3625	1.350	1.360
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	64151	214447	INDEX NUMBER: 123.91	CHANGE: -0.37%
GRAND TOTAL	471800	1165975	INDEX NUMBER: 155.12	CHANGE: -0.32%
NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET	109509			
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET	79921			

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Currency	Rate	Rate
British Pound	1.5200	1.5200
Deutsche Mark	1.5200	1.5200
Swiss Franc	1.5200	1.5200
French Franc	1.5200	1.5200
1 USD for 100 J.O.D.		
European Currency Unit (ECU)		
Currency	1 UNIT	3 MONTHS
U.S. Dollar	0.7000	0.7000
British Pound	0.7000	0.7000
Deutsche Mark	0.7000	0.7000
Swiss Franc	0.7000	0.7000
French Franc	0.7000	0.7000
Japanese Yen	0.7000	0.7000
European Currency Unit	0.7000	0.7000
Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin		
Currency	Buy	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7000	0.7000
British Pound	0.7000	0.7000
Deutsche Mark	0.7000	0.7000
Swiss Franc	0.7000	0.7000
French Franc	0.7000	0.7000
Japanese Yen	0.7000	0.7000
Dutch Guilder	0.4300	0.4300
Swedish Krona	0.4300	0.4300
Italian Lira	0.4300	0.4300
Belgian Franc	0.4300	0.4300
Other Currencies		
Currency	Buy	Offer
Lebanese Lira	1.5200	1.5200
Saudi Rial	0.3750	0.3750
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.3000	0.3000
Qatari Riyal	0.1900	0.1900
Egyptian Pound	0.2000	0.2000
Omani Rial	1.5500	1.5500
Ug'g' Dirham	0.1900	0.1900
Greek Drachma	0.2700	0.2700
Cypriot Pound	1.4800	1.4800



Thomas Muster

Muster becomes world No.1

PARIS (AFP) — Thomas Muster, the 28-year-old Austrian who was told he would never play tennis again after being run down by a drunken driver in 1989, was officially ranked as the world's number-one player by the ATP on Monday.

Muster, currently in Johannesburg where he is playing in Austria's Davis Cup match against South Africa, is the 13th player to claim to top computer ranking since they were first introduced in 1973. The left-handed Austrian clay-court specialist, winner of twelve titles in 1995 including the French Open, is the third player to take the top ranking so far this year.

Pete Sampras started 1996 as the number-one but lost the status to fellow-American Andre Agassi after the Australian Open.

Muster, the second oldest player to be top-ranked since John Newcombe dominated world tennis as a 30-year-old in 1974, may find it tough staying ahead of his rivals, however.

Sampras, who has regained the number-two spot from Agassi, is only nine points behind the Austrian, while Agassi trails Muster by just 195 points.

All three players are in action this week. Muster is playing in Dubai while Agassi and Sampras are scheduled to compete at San Jose.

During 1995 Muster had a 40-match winning streak and also won his first-ever indoor title at Essen.

After his knee injury in 1989 Muster astonished the tennis world with his determination to revive his career.

He resumed practicing against doctors' orders in a specially-designed chair.

Both Sampras and Agassi recently criticised the ATP's complicated rankings system saying that the fact that it could make Muster number-one proved that it was faulty.

Both said they wanted the "best fourteen results rule" to be scrapped.

"Every match should be made to count," said Sampras, adding: "Muster's year was phenomenal and he is by far the best clay court player we have. But I can't accept him as being the best player on other surfaces."

Agassi put it even more strongly.

"I don't put him in the 'top-ten' on surfaces outside clay. The ranking system is simply not a true indicator. On any other surface but clay, Muster has lost every time he has played Pete (Sampras), Boris (Becker) and Jim (Courier)... yet with our system he's the player who will be top."

"I am a little bit surprised at their reaction," struggled Muster, as he waited for a break in the weather in the South African capital.

"I think that both Pete and Andre are real champions and they have deserved every minute they have been number-one."

"But the only thing I can say is that I won more matches on hard courts than either of them won on clay."

"I don't think there is anything wrong with being a clay-court player — but I don't agree that I am just a clay-court specialist. I have also won a lot of times on hard courts. I won in Essen

last year and I reached the semifinals at the Australian Open."

And to prove that he hopes to break with his image, Muster said he intended to make a major effort in 1996 to prepare properly for Wimbledon.

"It is true that I have not much experience of playing on grass. Out of about 1200 matches that I have played in my career maybe just twelve or thirteen of them have been on grass," he said.

"But this year I am going to play Queens, then Halle, then Wimbledon. To do well on grass it is a case of getting the necessary experience," said the methodical Muster.

1. Thomas Muster (Aut)	4474
2. Pete Sampras (USA)	4465
3. Andre Agassi (USA)	4379
4. Boris Becker (Ger)	4145
5. Michael Chang (USA)	3537
6. Yevgeny Kafelnikov (Rus)	2769
7. Thomas Enqvist (Swe)	2519
8. Jim Courier (USA)	2349
9. Goran Ivanisevic (Cro)	2174
10. Wayne Ferreira (RSA)	1939
11. Richard Krajicek (Ned)	1678
12. Sergi Bruguera (Spa)	1657
13. Michael Stich (Ger)	1619
14. Todd Martin (USA)	1470
15. Arnaud Boesche (Fra)	1469
16. Marc Rosset (Sui)	1391
17. Gilbert Schaller (Aut)	1291
18. Andrei Medvedev (Ukr)	1279
19. Mats Wilander (Swe)	1265
20. Jan Siemerink (Ned)	1209
21. Magnus Larsson (Swe)	1201
22. Paul Hanin (Ned)	1182
23. Alberto Costa (Spa)	1178
24. Marcelo Rios (Chi)	1164
25. Mark Woodforde (Aus)	1058
26. Rocco Pietrangeli (Ita)	1039
27. Mark Philippoussis (Aus)	9833
28. Jonas Bjorkman (Swe)	1021
29. Bohdan Ustruck (Ukr)	1001
30. Todd Woodbridge (Aus)	984

India, Italy victorious in Davis Cup

PARIS (AFP) — India and Italy sprung surprises in the World Group Davis Cup first-round clashes at the weekend — India recovering to beat the Netherlands 3-2 and Italy defeating Russia by the same margin.

Exciting newcomer Mahesh Bhupathy, already his side's hero after beating Jan Siemerink in five sets on Friday, clinched the tie for India on the last grass courts of the Jai Club when his opponent Jacco Eltingh had to retire after suffering a groin strain.

Earlier Indian number-one Leander Paes, who had lost his singles on Friday, kept home hopes alive when he levelled the tie at 2-2 by beating Jan Siemerink 7-6 (7/2), 2-6, 7-6, (7/3), 7-6 (7/5).

India, semi-finalists in 1993 and finalists in 1996, 1974 and 1987, now face Sweden in a home quarter-final showdown in April.

The Swedes on Sunday completed a 4-1 victory over Belgium.

In Rome, Italy, who took a 2-1 lead over the competition finalists for the last two seasons by winning the Saturday doubles, made sure of their place in the last eight when Renzo Furlan won the final singles. He beat Andrei Chesnokov 6-0, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Earlier Yevgeny Kafelnikov had kept Russia in the tie by defeating Andrei Gaudenzi 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5.

The Indians have to wait to find out who their next opponents will be.

Incessant rain washed out play in the South Africa versus Austria tie in Johannesburg on Sunday with the overall scores still level at 1-1.

The match will now be switched to an indoor court with South Africans Wayne Ferreira and Gary Muller leading Thomas Muster and Alex Antonitsch 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (5/7), 1-2 in the doubles.

The venue switch to the standard bank arena on Monday did not upset Australia's team captain Ronnie Leight.

"I'm not unhappy with the situation because of the slow playing surface. It means our chances of overall victory may have improved — albeit ever so slightly," he said.

South African Danie Visser, who would have preferred to complete the match on the fast waverers grass court, shrugged off the move.

"This is Davis Cup and these things happen," he said, adding:

Defending champions, the United States, France, Germany and the Czech Republic had already clinched their quarter-final berths by taking unbeatable 3-0 leads on Saturday.

They all completed 5-1 wins.

Hakkinen to race in Australia

ESTORIL (AFP) — Finland's Mika Hakkinen will drive for McLaren in the opening Grand Prix of the season next month in Australia. It was announced here on the weekend.

"I feel very good. I have been training very intensively for the last four weeks so as to be as fit as possible, and I just can't wait to sit in the new car," said Hakkinen, who only three months ago was fighting for his life after a horrific crash in the Australian Grand Prix in Adelaide.

Hakkinen drove a Formula One car in France last week for the first time since the accident and astonished everybody.

"He did an incredible job," said team owner Ron Dennis, who was here to launch the new McLaren MP 4/11 car.

Hakkinen said he was not surprised he had been fast in the test at the Paul Ricard track, and that once he started driving in last year's car he said to himself: "This is great, this is fun."

The MP 4/11 ran for the first time here on Saturday, driven by former World Champion Alain Prost, now with a senior development role at McLaren.

"Compared to the '95 car it is much easier in corners," with better traction and downforce," said Prost.

Capriati returns to face the music... and steal the limelight

PARIS (AFP) — Jennifer Capriati, who wrote her name in the record books at Roland Garros in 1990 by becoming the youngest player to reach the semi-final of a Grand Slam tournament, returns to the French capital this week to relaunch her career.

Her decision to apply for a wild card for the \$450,000 Paris Gaz de France Indoor Open, took everybody by surprise — but tournament organisers at the Stade de Coubertin to the west of Paris were clearly delighted.

With world number-one Steffi Graf still injured and unable to defend her title and with France's Canadian-born Mary Pierce looking jaded and unconvincing — the event needs any additional interest it can muster. And a good run by Capriati could be a major dividend.

The 19-year-old American, who was the world's sixth-ranked player three years ago, turned her back on tennis after being beaten in the first-round of the 1993 United States Open.

But within a few months of her retirement Capriati was back in the headlines — and for all the wrong reasons.

First she was detained for shoplifting and then, eight months after her United States Open defeat, she was arrested in a motel on a drugs charge.

After undergoing psychiatric treatment and a rehabilitation course she tried to restart her career in Philadelphia in November 1994

— but was beaten by Anke Huber in the first round. She then withdrew from the 1995 Australian Open and disappeared from the media spotlight altogether until her request for a wild-card entry to the Paris tournament.

"We are obviously delighted she is coming," said a spokesman for the organisers.

"After a long preparation she says she is now ready both physically and mentally to play again."

Certainly Capriati, who has made it clear she intends to say nothing to the media until after completing her first match at the tournament on either Tuesday or Wednesday, looked impressive as she worked out in the Roland Garros underground indoor courts this weekend.

She is now back with father Stefano and younger brother Steven in Florida after living with her mother Denise in California when her parents divorced during the troubled period after she first quit tennis.

And it was with father in close attendance that she emerged at the weekend to have a hitting session with France's national coach Eric Debickler.

Capriati, who in recent months has been practicing hard at the Harry Hopman Tennis centre in Saddlebrook, Florida, has skimmed down since her father hired the services of highly-respected fitness coach Pat Etcheberry last November.

Etcheberry, who has

trained top players like Pete Sampras and Jim Courier, admits that it hasn't been an easy job getting Capriati back into shape but he says she has made considerable progress. He remains uncertain if she has the stamina to go all the way in a tournament but stresses that the best thing about the new Capriati is that she now "enjoys" practising. That was a far cry from the player who so detested training sessions in her early career.

Capriati's return to the tour coincides with her desire to defend her Olympic title at Atlanta later this year. Capriati won the gold medal by beating Steffi Graf in the Barcelona final.

She has already indicated that she is available for selection for the United States Federation Cup team — a necessary first step for Olympic consideration — but American team captain Billie Jean King says she will want to see some solid tournament results before considering Capriati for a team place.

Last year's finalist Mary Pierce, still looking for her first victory in France, will be hoping to reverse her recent slump in fortunes.

The big-hitting 20-year-old has dropped out of the "top-ten" after rising to become the world number three last November, and her second-round defeat by Germany's Anke Huber in a desperately disappointing title defence at this year's Australian Open has posed questions about her capability to climb back among the elite.

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Risks pay off for Kostner

SPAIN (AFP) — Italian Isolde Kostner risked everything and won the jackpot gold in the Women's Super Giant slalom, first race in the Alpine Skiing World Championships, here on Monday.

"I don't think it was possible to go any faster," Kostner said in the finish area.

"The course was set very fast and this was good for me. It was more like a downhill than a Super-G."

Kostner took a wide line to pick up speed and went into the long flats on the bottom of the course the absolute fastest. Her 1 minute 21.00 seconds meant an average speed on the course of 101.58kph.

Switzerland's Heidi Zurbriggen took the silver medal with 1:21.66. The sister of Pirmin, who dominated ski racing in the 80s, has never won a world cup race and had been considering retirement.

"I think Isolde was unbeatable today and I think she is definitely a favourite for the downhill," said Zurbriggen, obviously delighted with her silver medal.

The bronze medal went to Picabo Street, another downhill specialist, 0.71 seconds behind the leader in 1:21.66.

Defending champion Katja Seizinger's race lasted only 20 seconds. The German started odds-on favourite but set the ski edges too hard. She failed to recover and missed a gate.

"I made a mistake and that can happen to anyone," she said.

3 countries announce joint bid for 2006 Winter Games

SIERRA NEVADA (AP) — Austria, Italy and Slovenia have announced plans to make a joint bid to host the 2006 Winter Olympics to be held at sites in the three countries.

The plan has the support of all three national governments but is the creation of local authorities in the bordering towns of Arnoldstein, Austria, Tarvisio, Italy, and Kranjska Gora, Slovenia. All three sites are within 10-15 kilometres (6-9 miles) of each other.

The group, which claims it is the first to present a three-country bid, was among the nine candidates for the 2002 Games, which were awarded to Salt Lake City in the United States.

Cristiano Degano, the chairman of the committee created to promote the bid — Tarvisio 2006 — said his group had numerous advantages including the presence of nearly all the necessary infrastructure to stage the events.

The group announced its bid at the World Alpine Skiing Championships in Spain to take advantage of the many media attending from around the world.

"We don't need to build anything," Degano said. "Thus environmental impact will be minimal."

He also said there was an extensive transportation network in place throughout the region that would only need to be fine-tuned for the Olympics. He said finding accommodations would be the hardest part.

"Our bid fits in perfectly with the movement we're seeing by the Olympic committee to internationalise the games," Degano said. "For us, it would be a great opportunity to promote the many and diverse traditions of all three regions."

Degano didn't offer a cost estimate of the project, but said the expenses would be split evenly among the three European countries.



Former WBO heavyweight champion Tommy Morrison who was "medically suspended" for by the Nevada Athletic Commission, just hours before he was scheduled to fight (Reuters photo)

Morrison tests HIV positive

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — Heavyweight fighter Tommy Morrison, who had his license suspended shortly before he was due to fight in Las Vegas on Saturday night, was told he tested positive for the AIDS virus, the Los Angeles Times reported on Sunday.

The Times, in a story dated from Las Vegas, based the report on remarks from an unnamed source.

Marc Ratner, the Nevada State Athletic Commission executive director, has said only that Morrison was "medically suspended."

Ratner declined to comment on whether Morrison had tested positive for HIV. By law the commission cannot reveal the results of such tests publicly.

Morrison, the former World Boxing Organisation champion, was to fight unknown Arthur Weathers in a non-title bout on Saturday night.

He returned to his home in Oklahoma when it was clear the bout was off.

Morrison's manager, Tommy Holden, said: "We haven't talked to the doctor. If there is a problem, we will re-test. Let's give Tommy a few days. Right now, he is confused. He is going to find out what's going on. We feel Tommy has a bright future in boxing."

Morrison's trainer Tommy Virgetts told the newspaper: "Everyone has their speculation but that's all it is. Tommy was ready to go and he is frustrated as hell."

Nevada law requires fighters to take an AIDS test the first time they fight in the state in the calendar year. Morrison, 27 and with a record of 45-3-1, last fought in Las Vegas in June 1993 when he won a 12-round decision over George Foreman to take the WBO title.

Four months later he lost the belt to Michael Benoit on a first-round knockout.

In October, Morrison was knocked out by Briton Lennox Lewis in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

GOREN BRIDGE

Both vulnerable, North deals.

NORTH		EAST	
♠ 10 5		♠ K 7 5 2	
♥ A 6 4		♥ 8 6 3	
♦ A J 9		♦ 8 7 6 3 2	
♣ Q J 10 9 4		♣ 4 3	
WEST		SOUTH	
♠ Q 8 7 2		♠ A K J 9 6 4	
♥ Q J 10 9 4		♥ Void	
♦ 8 2		♦ K Q 10 7 4	
♣ 4 3		♣ 4 3	

The bidding:			
NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
4NT	Pass	5NT	Pass
5NT	Pass	6NT	Pass
6NT	Pass	7NT	Pass
7NT	Pass	8NT	Pass

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BACKWARD THINKING

Opening lead: Queen of ♣

When dummy has master trumps, a dummy reversal will often produce an extra trick. South's technique on this hand was exemplary.

After North's no-trump opening, South showed both misis. North's four hearts was a cue-bid agreeing diamonds, and thereafter both players cue-bid their controls. South went straight to the grand slam once the ace and king of clubs were located.

Declarer won the trick with the ace, discarding a spade from hand, and immediately ruffed a heart. Two rounds of trumps were drawn, ending in dummy. Had either defender failed to follow, declarer would have set up a 9-2 spade division and won the suit with a ruff. But once trumps broke reasonably, a better line was available. Declarer ruffed a heart, then went to the ten of clubs, then trumped dummy's ♠ heart. The queen of clubs was overtaken and the last trump was drawn. The final four tricks were taken by the two high clubs in dummy and the two master spades in the closed hand.

In all, declarer scored three trump tricks, one heart and three heart ruffs, two spade tricks and four clubs — just enough to fulfill the grand slam.

Opening lead: Queen of ♠

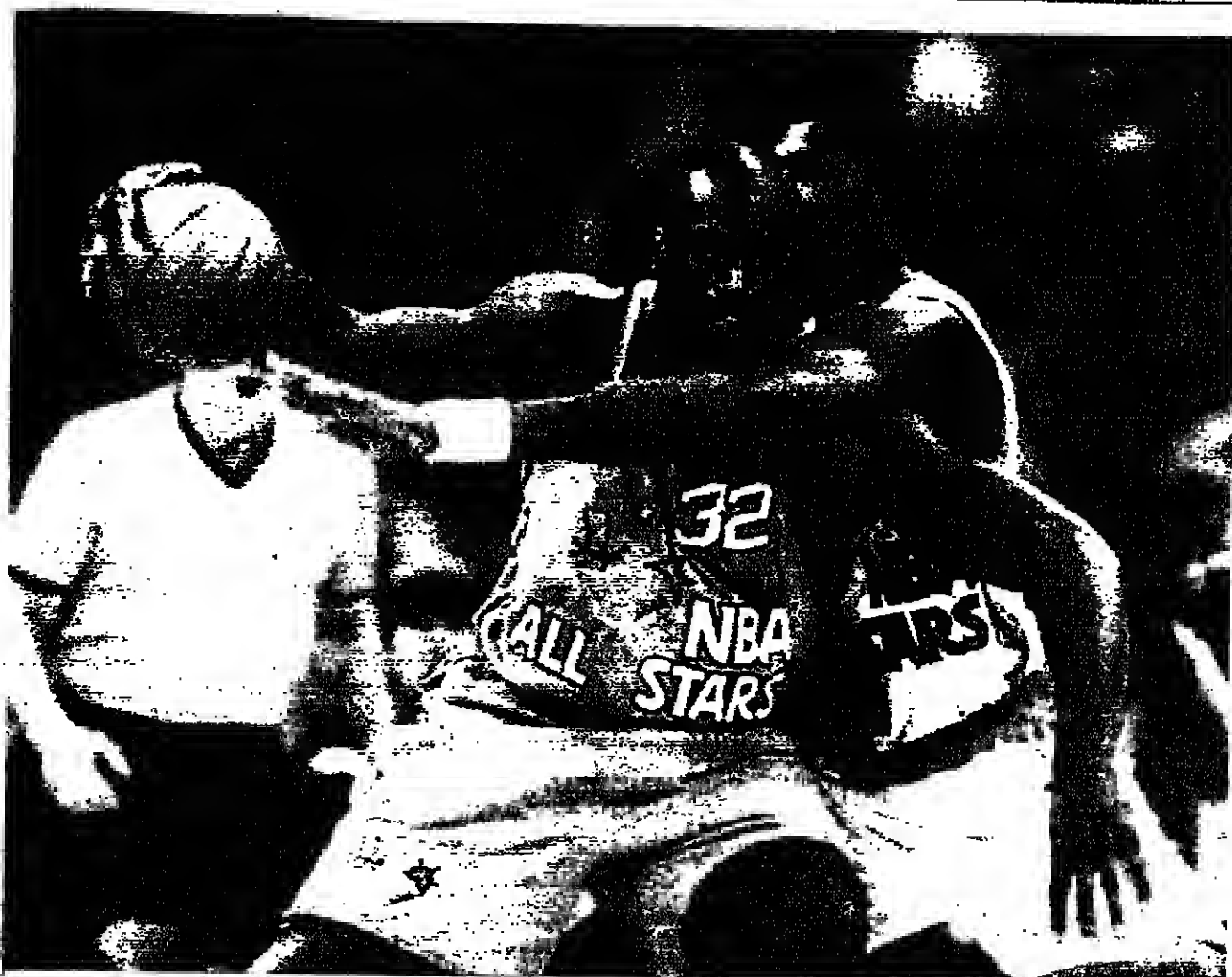
When dummy has master trumps, a dummy reveal will often produce an extra trick or two. South's technique on this hand was exemplary.

After North's no-trump opening, South showed both suits. North's four hearts was a cue-bid agreeing diamonds, and thereafter both players cue-bid their controls. South went straight to the grand slam once the ace and king of clubs were located.

Declarer won the first trick with the ace, discarding a spade from hand, and immediately ruffed a heart. Two rounds of trumps were drawn, ending in dummy. Had either defender failed to follow, declarer would have resorted to a 3-2 spade division and set up the suit with a ruff. But once trumps were reasonably, a better line was available. Declarer ruffed a heart, crossed to the ten of clubs and trumped dummy's last heart. The queen of clubs was overtaken and the last trump was drawn. The final four tricks were taken by the two high clubs in dummy and the two master spades in the closed hand.

To all, declarer scored three trump tricks, one heart and four clubs — just enough to fulfill the grand slam.

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Tom Hanks in Forrest Gump		Nabieleh Oubead/safiyah Al Omaree/Farouq Feeshawi in Atabeh Al Settat (ladie's Step) Arabic		CONCORD "1" On Deadly Ground Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORD "2" Jim Carie Shows: 2:30, 6:15		Shows: 12:30, 3, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 8:30 p.m. For reservation call 625155	
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NBA East All-Star Shaquille O'Neal (32) of the Orlando Magic drives into the outstretched arm of West All-Star Hakeem Olajuwon of the Houston Rockets (Reuters photo)

O'Neal, Jordan lift East to NBA All-Star victory

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (Agencies) — Michael Jordan, playing his first National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star game in three years, was named most valuable player as he scored 20 points in the East's 129-118 victory over the West.

But it was Orlando's Shaquille O'Neal who led the Eastern Conference in scoring with 25 points, including 11 in the pivotal third quarter. He also had 10 rebounds as the East beat the Western Conference for the second time in five years.

Jordan, who was the All-Star MVP in 1988, added eight of his 21 points in the third. Penny Hardaway added 18 points and seven assists and made two three-pointers to stop a West rally in the fourth quarter.

Jordan shot eight of 11 from the field, made all four of his free throws and grabbed four rebounds in 22 minutes on the floor.

He seemed a bit surprised that he, and not O'Neal, earned MVP honours.

"I didn't want to overshadow anyone," he said. "I was just basically trying to fit in. It's a great honour to even be considered and an even greater honour to win."

Eastern Conference coach Phil Jackson, Jordan's coach at Chicago, admitted: "I was surprised Michael got it."

"We knew whoever made a defensive stand was going to win it (the game). He made some great plays in the third quarter and Shaquille was dominant in the final."

Gary Payton led the West with 19 points. David Robinson added 18 and 11 rebounds. Shawn Kemp scored 12 points, 10 in the first quarter. Jason Kidd added seven points and 10 assists.

After Hakeem Olajuwon pulled the West within 69-65, O'Neal took a pass from Jordan as he was falling out of bounds and threw down a dunk as he was fouled.

O'Neal converted the free throw to extend the lead to 72-65.

Kemp jammed home a dunk, but O'Neal hit a hook to restore the lead to seven. Jordan hit two free throws and added a dunk, giving the East a 78-67 lead.

In the fourth quarter, the West narrowed the gap to 111-103. Hardaway hit back-to-back three-pointers to blunt the West's charge.

He hit his first three from the left wing. After a miss by the West, Hardaway checked down an errant pass and nailed a three-pointer from the left corner.

Jordan most unpopular MVP

The All-Star game's Most Valuable Player got a most negative response and nearly gave the trophy away.

Michael Jordan, who chose to sit on the bench for the last 16 minutes, was booed off the court at the Alamodome on Sunday after it was announced that he, rather than Shaquille O'Neal, had won the MVP award.

"I felt kind of strange standing out there accepting an MVP trophy when the crowd was making their own selection," Jordan said.



NBA East All-Star Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls studies with the NBA All-Star game MVP trophy following the East's 129-118 victory over the West (Reuters photo)

"They certainly responded to it."

"I was very shocked when I won, and the fans, they'll have their opinion. It easily could have been Shaq for the way he finished the game. He could have easily have been chosen MVP, and obviously would have deserved it."

"He can have the trophy if not winning it is going to make him mad the second half of the season I might give it to him whenever I go into the locker room," Jordan said.

Five minutes later, Jordan walked away from the interview table and left the trophy behind.

"I wouldn't take it," O'Neal responded when informed what Jordan said.

Jordan had 20 points, four

rebounds, and was on the floor in the fourth quarter when the East turned back the West's final challenge in a 129-118 victory.

Jordan won the MVP vote 4-3 over O'Neal. The voting was conducted late in the fourth quarter and the ballots were collected with 2:53 left.

O'Neal then had a rebound, a short one-hander and capped his scoring with a monster dunk on a fast break with 41.6 seconds left.

"I thought Shaq deserved the MVP," Charles Barkley said. "Michael didn't play any in the fourth quarter. Shaq played down the stretch and got a lot of points, but they took the voting before the game ended."

The crowd began booing when commissioner David Stern walked to centre court, picked up the trophy and pulled Jordan alongside him. It was perhaps the loudest response of the night — positive or negative — and it seemed to take Jordan aback.

"You don't want to overshadow anyone, you just want to fit in. I can understand their concerns. Perhaps the judges didn't have those concerns when they made their decisions. I don't vote. I couldn't do anything about it," Jordan said.

O'Neal seemed miffed by the whole affair.

He answered questions at his locker for several minutes but refused to go to the NBA's interview room. As he walked out of the building before any other player, his trademark smile was gone.

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Lebanon edges

Ecuador 1-0

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanon defeated Ecuador 1-0 in a warm-up soccer match for the 1996 World Cup qualifiers. Half-time score was 1-0.

The friendly match was held under heavy rain at Beirut's Bourj Hammoud stadium before an estimated 15,000 flag-brandishing fans.

In the 20th minute, Lebanon's Armenian forward Vartan Ghazarian took a long pass from midfield and lobbed the ball from 15 meters (yards) over Ecuadorian goalkeeper Jose Cevallos to score the only goal of the match.

The Lebanese then went on the defensive. Rain and mud kept Ecuador's strikers from equalising.

It was the first time that an Ecuadorian national squad has played in Lebanon, which is recovering from a 1975-90 civil war.

Australia's Riley tests positive for drugs

SYDNEY (AFP) — Samantha Riley, golden girl of Australian swimming, may miss the Atlanta Olympics after testing positive for a drug she apparently took to stop a headache.

The 23-year-old triple world record-breaking breaststroke swimmer was reported to have tested positive for Dextropropoxyphen. The penalty for using this pain killer is a two year suspension.

Her coach Scott Volker said: "It was inadvertently taken. That's all I can comment on. There was no performance-enhancing drug. There is nothing to hide."

Riley had complained of a headache two days before her first race at the short-course world championships in Rio de Janeiro in December where she won two gold medals.

"She was totally not at fault over the incident and we just hope people will see it that way," Volker added.

Vina Murray, executive director of Australian Swimming Inc., confirmed the sport's governing body, FINA, was investigating.

Riley broke the long-course world record at the 1994 world championships in Rome and set two world records winning the 100m and

200m breaststroke gold medals at the short-course championships in Rio.

Dextropropoxyphen is a narcotic analgesic mainly used as a pain killer and produces a false feeling of invincibility.

At an extraordinary congress on doping at Rio in November, FINA laid down a two-year ban for this type of drug.

FINA also doubled the ban for anabolic steroids to four years, followed by life suspension for second offenders.

Under the new measures, federations would be fined 10,000 dollars if a second swimmer fails a test during a four-year period.

If a third swimmer is banned, the fine would rise to 30,000 dollars. If four or more are banned, the federation and all its swimmers would be suspended for two years.

If the policy had been in force last year during the Asian Games, where 11 Chinese athletes — including seven swimmers — tested positive, Chinese swimmers would have been missed the Atlanta Olympics.

Australia and the United States had led a campaign calling for stronger action against China following that Asian Games debacle.

Weah again on target for AC Milan

PARIS (AFP) — AC Milan stretched their lead at the top of the Italian League to five points on Sunday with World, European and African 'Football of the Year' George Weah netting the only goal against struggling Atalanta inside the first minute.

The quicksilver Liberian, sent clear by Frenchman Marcel Desailly, blasted home his second goal in as many games since returning from African Nations' Cup duty ten days ago in the opening sixty seconds of the game.

Second-placed Fiorentina kept it touch by beating third-placed Parma by the same scoreline. Christian Amoroso netted the only goal after 26 minutes, picking up a loose ball after Parma goalkeeper Luca Bucci fumbled a Gabriel Batistuta free-kick.

Juventus, 11 points behind the leaders, kept in the chase with a 4-1 thrashing of Cagliari. Fabrizio Ravanelli scored twice, Alessandro Del Piero added a third and Vladimir Jugovic added the fourth.

It was an unhappy return to old pastures for former Juve manager Giovanni Trapattoni, now in charge of Cagliari. Trapattoni led Juventus to stinging titles during the 1980s.

In Spain, Barcelona closed the gap on runaway leader Atletico to eight points by hammering rivals Real Madrid 3-0 at the Nou Camp, while Atletico surprisingly lost their unbeaten home record by crashing 1-0 to struggling Seville.

Bosnian striker Meho Kodric did the damage for Barcelona by scoring two of his side's goals. Portuguese winger Luis Figo was also on target.

Atletico dominated their match against Seville, who had taken only one point from their previous seven matches, but squandered their chances. They paid the penalty when Gabriel Moya scored on a counter-attack thirteen minutes from the whistle.

Compostela moved above Espanyol to take third place after a 3-2 home win over Zaragoza. Christopher Ohen' hit the winner in the last minute.

Espanyol were held 1-1 at

Racing Santander, with Jose Rojo rescuing a point.

In the Bundesliga, which returned to action after the winter break, Hamburg jolted Bayern Munich's title hopes with a 3-1 win — coming from behind to snatch the points in the last five minutes.

Mehmet Scholl put Otto Rehhagel's men ahead on 28 minutes and, had the Bayerns held on, they could have joined Dortmund on 41 points at the summit.

International Pavel Kuka levelled on 23 after being pulled through by Brazilian Arlwin.

Although Borussia were able to welcome back Swiss striker Stephane Chapuisat after a year out through injury, he drew a blank.

Bad weather wiped out half the programme.

In France, Paris Saint Germain slid to their first home defeat of the season on Sunday, allowing Montpellier to storm back from 2-0 down to snatch a last-gasp 3-2 victory.

EUROPEAN SOCCER

But in an unlikely turnaround, Andre Breitenreiter equalised four minutes from time and Uwe Jahnig then snatched the winner in the dying seconds to the delight of the 56,000 crowd at the Volksparkstadion.

Champions Dortmund had extended their advantage Saturday with a disappointing 1-1 draw at lowly Kaiserslautern.

Dortmund youngster Lars Ricken put the reigning champions ahead after just nine minutes, but Czech in-

ter national Pavel Kuka levelled on 23 after being pulled through by Brazilian Arlwin.

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Gulf leaders and politicians denounce Bahrain bombing

MANAMA, Bahrain (AP) — Gulf leaders and politicians Monday rushed to express support for Bahrain's government after a luxury hotel here was bombed, wounding four people.

They also backed the emirate in its effort to track down the bombers and contain weeks of anti-government unrest. No new measures have yet been announced.

The region's royal rulers are anxious to contain the disturbances, which they claim is orchestrated by their giant neighbour Iran.

The bombing Sunday of the seafarer Diplomat Hotel was the second against prestige targets in downtown Manama in less than a month. A small bomb exploded in the Royal

Meridien Hotel Jan. 17, but caused no casualties.

Kuwait's emir telephoned Bahrain's ruler "denouncing and condemning actions that are aimed at harming Bahrain and its people," the government-run Gulf News Agency reported.

Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah expressed Kuwait's "full support for all measures" taken to ensure security in Bahrain, in the telephone call to the emir, Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa.

Also Monday, a delegation of pro-government Kuwaiti lawmakers arrived in Bahrain on a trip to express support for the government.

They were to meet with members of the royally appointed Bahraini Consultative Council,

which advises the ruler on policy.

Collectively, the six nations grouped in the Gulf Cooperation Council condemned the bombing in a statement issued by the organisation's Secretary General, Sheikh Fahim Bin Sultan Al Qassimi.

He also expressed concern over interference in Bahrain by "foreign parties" — a codeword for Iran — who were "agitating the unrest and disturbing security in the Gulf."

But Mr. Qassimi also stressed that the GCC wants "good-neighbourly relations" with Iran.

The council's members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar.

Bosnian Serb officers transferred to the Hague

SARAJEVO (AFP) — Two senior Bosnian Serb officers were released from detention in Sarajevo and transferred to the Hague-based war-crimes tribunal Monday. Bosnia's prime minister told AFP.

"The Hague (war-crimes tribunal) decided to take two senior officers — Djukic and Krstanovic — for further prosecution at the Hague," Bosnia's premier, Hasan Muratovic, said.

General Djorje Djukic, head of Bosnian Serb logistics during the war, and his deputy Colonel Aleksa Krstanovic were being transferred to the U.N. court Monday evening, Mr.

Muratovic added. "They've been delivered to the Hague. They left from here with prosecutors who came from the Hague and who held preliminary investigation here," the prime minister said.

(In the Hague, a Dutch official said a judicial transfer operation was expected Monday evening, adding "the destination of the transfer is Scheveningen" near the Hague.

(A prison there has cells reserved for people charged by the international criminal tribunal. The source did not confirm that those expected were Djukic and Krstanovic.)

Four other Serb soldiers held by the Bosnian authorities were released after the Hague said they were not interested in them, he added. "We said before that we were going to comply with all the decisions of the Hague tribunal," Mr. Muratovic said.

Earlier Monday, several French armoured vehicles pulled up outside Sarajevo's central prison. In scenes reminiscent of a thriller movie, two men, their heads bowed and wearing flak jackets and helmets, were escorted into two of the vehicles under heavy armed French escort. It is thought the pair were the general and his colonel deputy.



250 CARS CRASH IN ITALY: A policeman and an unidentified man stand on top of some of 250 cars involved in a multiple pile-up on a fog-bound motorway on Monday, between the cities of Vicenza and Verona, northern Italy. At least 11 people were killed and more than 100 injured in the crash. It was the Italy's worst road accident since 1989 when 13 people died in a motorway pile-up in the centre of the country (Reuters photo)

Major warns of more bomb attacks

LONDON (R) — British Prime Minister John Major on Monday said IRA guerrillas might detonate more bombs in the wake of a fatal London blast but vowed to press ahead with elections to move the Northern Irish peace process forward.

In an emergency statement to parliament in which he paid tribute to the two men killed in Friday's blast, Mr. Major said the IRA had to resume its ceasefire before there could be any return to ministerial talks with Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing.

"We are not at the end of the road for peace. If we are pushed back, we will start again... There can be no end to this search for a permanent

settlement in Northern Ireland," Mr. Major told a sombre House of Commons.

Mr. Bruton attacked Mr. Major's plan for elections to open the way for all-party peace talks, saying it would "pour petrol on the flames", but Mr. Major said it was still the best way forward.

"This proposal has been consistently misrepresented by Sinn Fein and misunderstood more widely," a grim-looking Major said.

"I repeat now that its purpose is to lead directly and speedily to negotiations between all parties committed to peaceful and democratic methods, aimed at reaching a comprehensive political settlement."

The election plan, unveiled last month, is designed to get round the refusal of pro-British Unionists to talk to Sinn Fein until the IRA gives up its arms and Sinn Fein's insistence that all-party talks must start before arms can be scrapped.

But the Irish government argues Mr. Major is seeking to sidestep a report by an international committee, chaired by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, that suggested guerrillas should disarm in stages as all-party talks get underway.

Sinn Fein was also outraged, saying Britain was showing bad faith and trying to put yet more obstacles in the road to peace.

Without gloves and every-thing screaming "Michael, Michael," said Jose Luiz De Oliveira, president of the Residents' Association. There had been much speculation over how the health-conscious Jackson would cope with the less-than-perfect sanitary conditions in the shantytown, especially after he arrived in Brazil wearing a black surgical mask. But today Jackson seemed carefree about the open drains and rubbish, waving at every opportunity to his screaming admirers from a makeshift patio which commanded panoramic views of Rio's more obvious tourist attractions.

Michael Jackson thrills Rio's slum dwellers

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (R) — Pop singer Michael Jackson thrilled thousands of residents in a poor Rio neighbourhood Sunday while filming a music video which officials had tried to ban. Relaxed and smiling broadly at thousands perched precariously on shanty roofs, Jackson looked completely at home in this patchwork of brick and wood houses, clinging to the hillside. The city's shantytowns are normally shunned by outsiders because of drugs and violence, so security was tight throughout the filming. 1,500 policemen and 50 residents acting as security guards effectively sealed off the Dona Marta shantytown Saturday night. "Michael's arrival was very moving. He landed by helicopter, dust everywhere, without a mask, without gloves and every-thing screaming "Michael, Michael," said Jose Luiz De Oliveira, president of the Residents' Association. There had been much speculation over how the health-conscious Jackson would cope with the less-than-perfect sanitary conditions in the shantytown, especially after he arrived in Brazil wearing a black surgical mask. But today Jackson seemed carefree about the open drains and rubbish, waving at every opportunity to his screaming admirers from a makeshift patio which commanded panoramic views of Rio's more obvious tourist attractions.

Iraq hopeful of oil-for-food accord soon

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq said Monday it was optimistic of reaching a deal with the United Nations soon on a resumption of limited oil exports and warned its people against firing guns to celebrate the announcement of an accord.

"All the signs point to an end soon to the negotiations underway in New York and an agreement on the resumption of oil exports," an Iraqi official told AFP, asking not to be named.

Iraq and the United

Nations opened talks in New York last Tuesday on U.N. resolution 986, which would allow Baghdad to sell one billion dollars of oil per quarter in exchange for food and medicine.

The full-scale talks were to resume Monday after adjourning on Thursday.

Meanwhile, interior ministry official General Taber Jalil Al Habbush warned Iraqis against the traditional celebration of firing automatic weapons into the air to mark the announcement

of an accord.

"People who fire into the air will be severely punished," he told the government daily Al Jumhuriya.

He said dozens of people were wounded by shots fired to mark the start of negotiations with the U.N. last week. "Some have died in hospital because of the shortage of medicine" caused by U.N. sanctions, Gen. Habbush added.

According to Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak, 1,600 people

were hospitalised because of the celebratory gunfire.

Gen. Habbush also said Iraq would "soon hear of important economic developments" and that prices would continue to fall.

Since Baghdad announced last month it had agreed to oil-for-food talks with the U.N., food prices more than halved because of the spectacular rise of the national currency, the dinar.

Iraq has been under crippling U.N. oil and trade sanctions since 1990.

Israel, Arabs to work on definition of 'displaced'

CAIRO (AFP) — Israel and Arab nations are to meet here on Tuesday to try to agree a definition of a displaced Palestinian, in talks on the return of those who lost their homes in the 1967 Middle East war.

Delegates from Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians will gather for the seventh session of the committee on displaced persons, the PLO's permanent representative to the Arab League Mohammad Sobeih said.

Once it has defined the term "displaced," the committee will then be able to decide how many Palestinians should be authorised to return to the territories.

"For Israel the problem to discuss is about the definition of 'displaced' and to resolve their number," a spokesman for the Israeli embassy in Cairo, Yaacov Setty, said.

Wranglings over the definition has dominated previous sessions of the committee in Amman, Cairo and Haifa since it first met in March 1995.

Mr. Sobeih accused Israel of "holding up everything and wasting time on the topic."

"We consider as displaced anyone driven from the territories in 1967 along with their wives and children who were born afterwards, but Israel differs over including relatives," Mr. Sobeih said.

The committee is tasked with hammering out the details of "the admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967" under the 1993 self-rule accord between Israel and the PLO. "The return of displaced is supposed to have been completed or at least begun by the start of final status talks" in May, Mr. Sobeih said.

Final negotiations are to deal with the return of Palestinian refugees, defined as those who fled their homes during the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, as well as the final status of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The United Nations says a total of 350,000 Palestinians were displaced in 1967, while Israel says they now number only 200,000.

Faruq Kaddoumi, head of the PLO political department, told AFP on Sunday the number of the displaced had swelled to 750,000 including dependents.

"Israel still has not implemented a basic article (of the self-rule accord) allowing the return of 750,000 displaced Palestinians. This provision is clear, but Israel refuses whatever it wants from the agreements," he said.

Crazed Thai elephant rescued after long swim

BANGKOK (R) — A crazed elephant, which roamed wildly through the Thai jungle after bursting its chains on the weekend, was found swimming in deep sea nearly a day later. A member of the rescue team in Trat province, about 387 kilometres southeast of Bangkok, said Monday the team spent about three hours trying to pull 20-year-old Kamphan from the waters of the Gulf of Thailand. Kamphan's owner told rescuers that the jumbo broke free of his chains late Saturday night and went running off through the jungle. It ran throughout the night and was found Sunday swimming about 10 kilometres from the shore. The elephant struggled in the water but was calm when it reached the beach and was reunited with its owner, a rescue worker said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Hizbollah kills 2 SLA militiamen

TYRE, Lebanon (AFP) — Hizbollah guerrillas killed two Israeli-backed militiamen in a bomb attack Monday in an occupied zone of South Lebanon, inflicting the militia's first fatalities so far this year. A spokesman for the South Lebanon Army (SLA) said a third militiaman was seriously wounded as the bomb exploded in the central sector of Israel's "security zone." The device was set off by remote control as a patrol drove by. The Iranian-backed Hizbollah claimed responsibility for the attack.

Japanese troops welcomed to Golan

QUNEITRA, Syria (AFP) — U.N. officials organised an official ceremony on the disputed Golan Heights on Monday to welcome 45 Japanese troops joining a U.N. peacekeeping mission here. The ceremony took place at Camp Fawar, base of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) set up a year after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war to supervise the ceasefire between Syria and Israel and the disengagement of their forces. The Japanese contingent from the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) will replace a Canadian unit carrying out transport duties along the buffer zone between Syria and Israel.

Yemen backs French mediation

CAIRO (AFP) — Yemen voiced support Monday for French efforts to broker an end to its armed standoff with Eritrea over a Red Sea island. Yemen's representative to the Arab League Ahmed Mohammed Nuaman said he met with league Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid to "inform him of the latest developments" in the two countries' dispute. Mr. Nuaman said Sanaa was "comfortable with French mediation efforts to find a peaceful" way out of the dispute.

Sudan in search of Mubarak's would-be killers

KHARTOUM (R) — Khartoum, under pressure to arrest and hand over three Egyptians suspected of trying to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak last year, on Monday ordered all Egyptians in Sudan to report to police within 10 days. The interior ministry ordered all Egyptians, including those with diplomatic passports, to register at the nearest police station within 10 days. In a statement broadcast on state radio, it also said all Egyptians leaving Sudan would have their papers checked.

Turkey using water weapon against Arab nations — league

CAIRO (AFP) — Turkey aims to impose its will on its Arab neighbours and push its regional influence by using water as a weapon, the Arab League said in a report on Monday. "Despite repeated Turkish denials of the possibility of using water resources for political ends, it is impossible to rule out that possibility," said a report from the league's military department received by AFP.

The report pointed to Ankara's dam building on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which flow into Syria and Iraq, and "its insistence on continuing its GAP project."

GAP, a \$30 billion project, aims to build 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power stations along the Euphrates and other rivers in Turkey's southeast Anatolia region. Both Syria and Iraq have accused Turkey, where the Euphrates rises, of meddling with the waters and ignoring their needs. A session of the league's member foreign ministers in March is to examine the issue. The report also criticised a 1987 proposal by Ankara to build a "peace pipeline" to transport six million cubic meters of water a day from rivers feeding the Euphrates to sell to Syria, Iraq and the six Gulf monarchies. Ankara "aims through this

project to increase its regional role and, if completed, this project could have damaging effects on Arab security," the report said. It "will be a means of pressuring Arab countries to attune their policies to Turkish interests in particular or American and Western interests in general."

"It cannot be ruled out that Turkey will resort either by its own decision or under pressure from the United States to threatening to cut the flow of water to Arab countries," the report said. The report also raised the possibility of Israel "destroying the pipeline or extorting concessions not to do so" if it is not allowed to join the water network.

Turkish dam-building on the Euphrates in 1990 reduced the water flow into Syria by 40 per cent and into Iraq by 80 per cent, the report said. Dams on the Tigris have cut down the flow into Iraq by 50 per cent, the report said. Under a protocol signed in 1987, Turkey has to ensure a flow from the Euphrates of 500 cubic metres per second into Syria, which then supplies 58 per cent of this water to Iraq. The 2,800-kilometre-long river flows from Turkey into Syria and then travels into Iraq. The Tigris, which also rises in Turkey, is further to the east and flows solely into Iraq.

Israel summons Egyptian ambassador

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's foreign ministry summoned Egyptian Ambassador Mohammad Bassiuni Monday to protest Egyptian media reports that Israeli soldiers executed Egyptian prisoners of war and sold their organs for transplants in the 1950s and 1960s.

Deputy Foreign Minister Eli Dayan said he complained during their meeting over the media reports and the fact that Israel had not been invited to the International Book Fair opening in Cairo next month. "Not only are we not invited to the International Book Fair, but we read that the organisers will have a special day on the issue of prisoners of war," he said.

Security for journalists urged after Algiers bomb

PARIS (R) — An international press watchdog urged Algerian President Liamine Zeroual Monday to step up protection of journalists after 18 people were killed by a car bomb explosion outside Algiers' main press centre.

"Reporters Without Borders (RSF) begs you to take the steps needed to improve the security of journalists in Algeria," RSF said in a letter to Mr. Zeroual.

The Paris-based watchdog also asked Mr. Zeroual to set up an independent commission to probe the bombing and previous attacks on journalists, and to grant visas to RSF members so they could investigate the killings and working conditions for journalists in the North African country. RSF took Mr. Zeroual to

task for this month's tightening of controls on media reporting of political violence.

"These various steps actually mean censorship of the Algerian press and infringe press freedom and the right to information," it said.

RSF said the latest bombing took to 54 the number of journalists slain in Algeria since 1993. Sunday's bomb went off outside La Maison de la Presse, an office building where Algeria's main newspapers are based. It killed 18 and wounded 52.

30 detained after drug haul at Swedish 'rave'

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Swedish police said they detained 30 youths and seized drugs after a pre-dawn raid on a "rave" party in a Stockholm suburb. A 90-strong police squad burst in as the 500-odd people partied during the early hours of Sunday morning at Nacka, near Stockholm. "We seized 25 different sorts of drugs, mainly ecstasy and hashish, and found several weapons, mainly knives," said police spokesman Bror Aasa, without giving an estimated value for the drugs seizure. The 30 people held for questioning were aged between 16 and 30. The party shed, known as Docklands, had been under police surveillance for several weeks and will be henceforth shut down.